Pierre Rode's 250th anniversary | Cello memories: Laurence Lesser on Casals and Piatigorsky | Gidon Kremer Sentimental Work

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AUGUSTIN HADELICH

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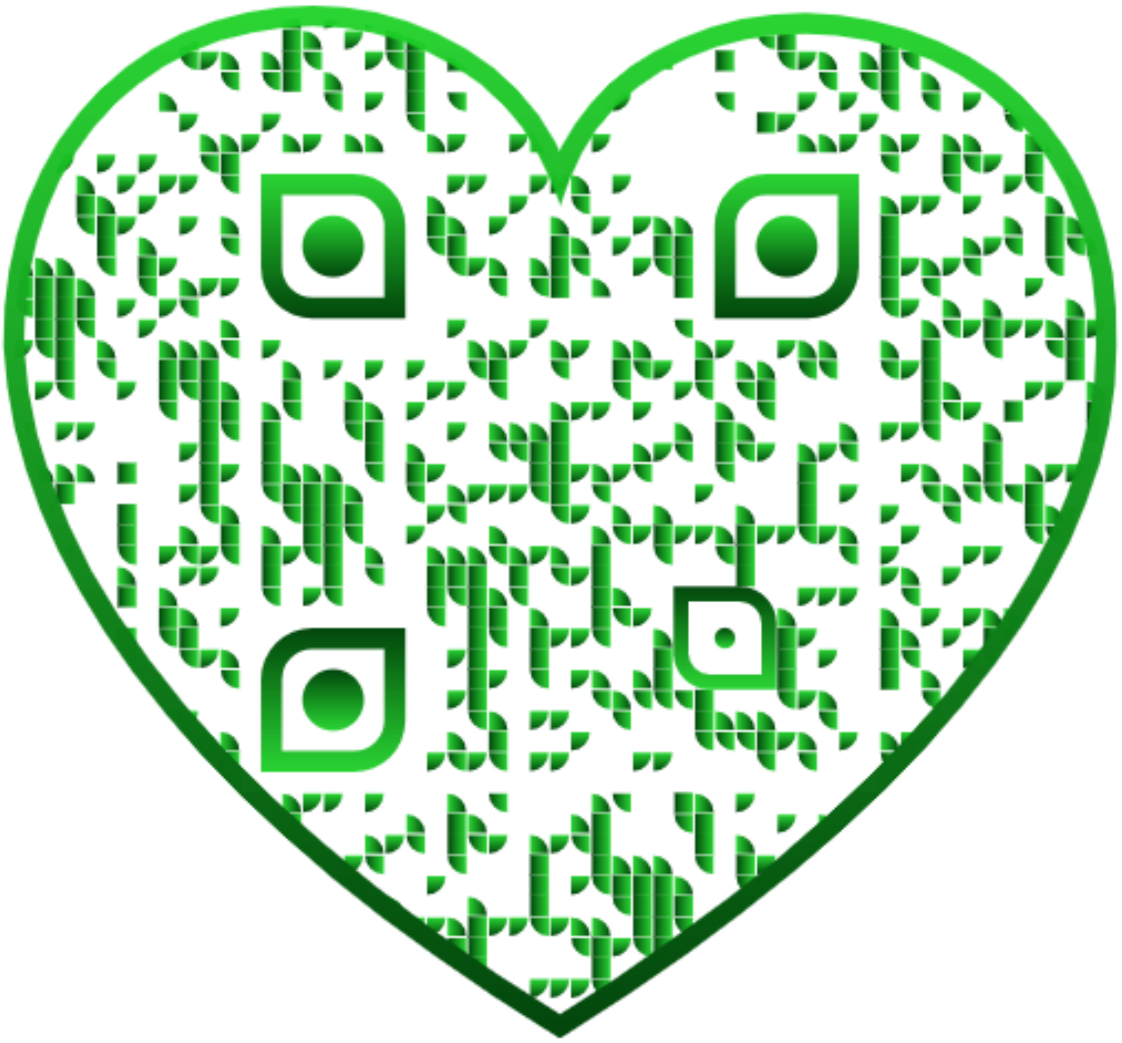

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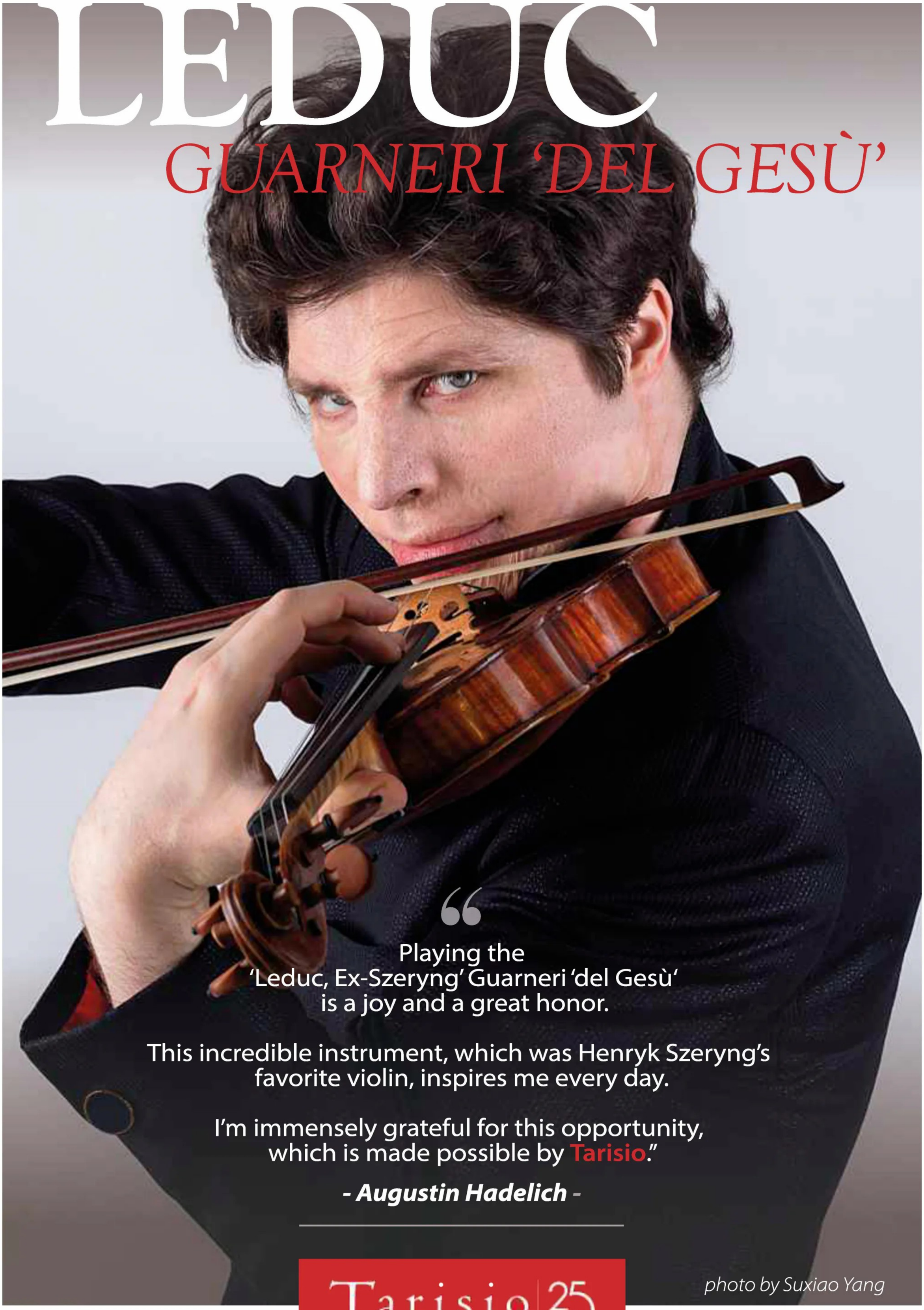

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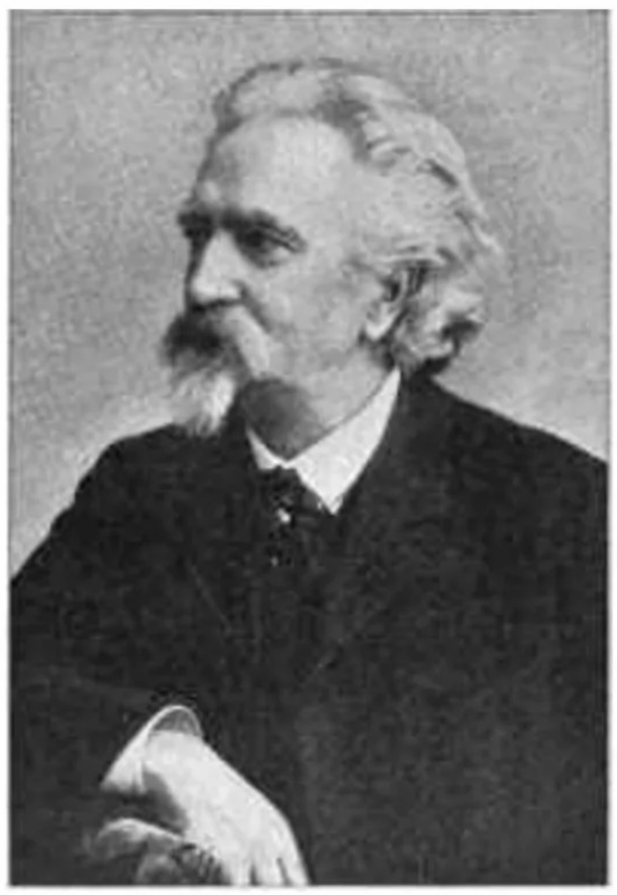

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Editor's letter

Augustin Hadelich likes to keep himself busy. This star violinist's secret to remaining fresh and engaged with every concert he plays, as he tells Ariane Todes on page 24, is a broad focus on repertoire. 'I enjoy every concert so much,' he says. 'An ideal career is one where I keep enjoying it this much and never get bored. This is why I don't restrict myself to a few pieces each season.'

Also in this issue we hear from the Los Angeles-based cellist Laurence Lesser, who has enjoyed a long and rewarding career both playing and teaching. This includes collaborating with 20th-century legends such as Casals, Cassadó, Piatigorsky and Heifetz. His 85th birthday last year, and a photo he took of Piatigorsky and Casals together in Puerto Rico in 1967, prompted him to write an account of his formative years as a musician. Read it on page 32.

Pierre Rode is known to most violinists for his didactic 24 Caprices, or as dedicatee for Beethoven's last violin sonata, or perhaps also in the same breath as Baillot and Kreutzer, with whom he collaborated on the seminal *Méthode de Violon*. But there was more to this French virtuoso, who was born 250 years ago this year. As well as having a colourful personal life and a career full of ups and downs, he left behind 13 violin concertos that deserve to be heard more often. The German violinist Friedemann Eichhorn is a particular champion of these works and has recorded all of them over the past few years. He speaks to Charlotte Gardner on page 46 about why, in this anniversary year, Rode's compositions deserve a reassessment.

In lutherie this month, Clifford Hall examines the life of Otto Schünemann, a 19th-century German maker who created highly respected instruments, and on page 52 Arnold E. Schnitzer advises on how to set up a double bass – a delicate instrument, despite its size.

Emma Baker editor
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Cover photo Suxiao Yang

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LIONNEL GENOVART

(In Focus, page 59)

has been a maker and restorer of violins, violas, cellos and bows since 1997. Based in Rome, he also researches the history of violin making in Argentina and is a professor on the IberOrquestas teaching programme, which operates across Latin America.

ALEXANDRA GORSKI

(Opinion, page 21)

is a Ukrainian–American violinist, teacher and writer. She is the associate concertmaster of the Sofia Philharmonic, member of the Classic FM Radio Orchestra and a principal member of recording groups The Sofia Session Orchestra and Bulgarian Symphony Orchestra.

JACK LIEBECK

(Technique, page 78)

is a British–German violinist. He is the first Émile Sauret professor of violin at London's Royal Academy of Music and artistic director of the Australian Festival of Chamber Music. He plays the 1785 'Ex-Wilhelmj' Guadagnini.

PETKO PETKOV

(Trade Secrets, page 62)

is a master violin maker located in Kazanlak, Bulgaria, situated in the heart of the Rose Valley. He has been dedicated to the art of violin making since 1999, handcrafting violins, violas and cellos. He is also a member of the governing board of the Bulgarian Luthiers Association.

WOLFGANG SCHIELE

(Making Matters, page 68)

is a Munich-based violin maker. He trained in Mittenwald with stops in Besançon, Paris, New York and London, and now specialises in making new instruments. He is an enthusiastic amateur musician on the violin and viola.

ARNOLD E. SCHNITZER

(Double bass set-up, page 52)

began maintaining and building instruments while working as a professional musician. He ran a busy and successful repair and sales business in New York for over 30 years and now concentrates on making new basses and cellos in New Mexico.

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LETTER *of the* MONTH

Bassist Mark Elton's smashed instrument

HIGHLY STRUNG

I was interested to read the news story on the double bass apparently smashed by careless Qantas baggage handlers (see page 13). Looking at the photos, though, I notice that the bass is strung. Now, I am not saying that taking the set down would have made a difference in this instance, but I would point out that the double bass has a string tension of approximately 250 pounds (115kg). Even a simple collapse of the bridge while in transit could potentially crack a plate or impale it against the soundpost. So I would suggest that players detune the instrument to slacken the strings, then wrap up the bridge in padding, and put rubber bands round the tuners to apply inward pressure. This is much easier than dealing with up to four unravelled strings. This is my own standard practice for shipping instruments.

Finally, the protection afforded by a 'true' travel case cannot be ignored. A simple wood structure case with fabric is never appropriate for mass transit.

T. MATTHEW JOHNSON
Rochester, MN, US

PAYING THE PRICE

Rachael Ridge's article on the 'dark side of being an adult beginner' (bitly.ws/3ba7b) all makes perfect sense. I began late and was in a hurry. Adult beginners have to be, if they are serious. What is critical here is finding a good teacher that matches. You can have two lessons with a great tutor and learn more than you can in twenty with a lesser one. This isn't just economics either. There are many 'teachers' who have no idea what they are doing and can actually set you back or instil terrible habits in you. The common denominator among the latter is that they simply can't remember what it was like to begin to learn the violin, and attack the priorities and essentials, nor can they tailor the necessary principles to the characteristics of you as a person.

To give an example of the extraordinary things teachers can leave out: it took six years for any teacher I had to tell me when playing with others to start *on* the string. I had to wait until an orchestra leader told me: 'You know, in this orchestra we always start on the string!' So take your time and get a heap of recommendations, and don't be frightened to spend money when it's worth it.

DAVID RENTON
Majorca, Spain

A Music in Mind session with Camerata musicians

MUSIC IN MIND PHOTO COURTESY MANCHESTER CAMERATA. BASS PHOTO MARK ELTON

A COMMUNITY EFFORT

I was overjoyed to read that the Association of British Orchestras has recognised the work of Manchester Camerata's pioneering 'Music in Mind' team at their annual awards ceremony on 24 January. For the past twelve years, musicians from the Camerata have been going into care homes alongside music therapists, encouraging residents with dementia to get involved and participate in the music

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS

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making activities. I for one have seen how music-based therapy can stimulate patients' memory, creativity and enjoyment of life; and at one session, one of the carers told me how therapeutic it was for them as well, as seeing patients respond in an alert, engaged way after so long could lift their own spirits more than anything else. I really hope that this award prompts more ensembles across the country to follow suit, and at least experiment with the possibilities of engaging with their local community in this way.

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YOU BE YOU

I was happy to read the thoughts of Carolin Widmann (*right*) on classical students expanding their horizons (Life Lessons, January 2024). She encourages young players to find what 'makes them special'. It reminds me of my first encounter with improvisation, during a music camp very early into my cello education. I must have been seven or eight. We went around the group, and each player had to play a few notes that would sound good on top of a drone the teacher was playing on the piano. You could feel that we were terrified, including myself! But when the time came, it seemed to flow out of me naturally, and without realising it, I had gone completely over my 'limit' and started playing a full melody! I never went into improvisation in a serious or professional way – nor did I with classical cello – but the self-confidence I gained from seeing myself do something I didn't expect, and which made me special, at least among the terrified ten or so other pupils, has stayed with me since.

JOLENE A. AGUTTES
Ann Arbor, MI, US

ONLINE COMMENT

In an unusual turn of events, an audience member threw a bra at violinist Ray Chen following his performance of the Tchaikovsky Concerto in Munich. *The Strad* audience didn't hold back from sharing their surprised reactions and witty remarks bitly.ws/3aRo7

DON A. BAILEY Damn… Gotta start practising my violin again.
GARY GAY It was bound to happen sooner or later!
SUZANA SUKOVIC This bra flew on the wings of assumptions: that it is either cute, funny, welcome or hits the right note with Chen.
VINCE RAMELOT I could understand if he has performed the BRAhms Concerto.
JONATHAN N. SHERWELL Note to self – learn to play violin.

WIDMANN PHOTO LENNARD RUEHLE. PLATE PHOTOS OREST PUTSENTELA

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ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

1 Why I switched careers from violinist to psychologist: an interview with Tanja Roos bitly.ws/3b9ui

2 Your violin, your legacy: the story of my violin 'Mrs Evans' bitly.ws/3b9uT

3 'Music must be played, life must go on': an update from Ukrainian violin maker Orest Putsentela bitly.ws/36z6Y

PODCAST OF THE MONTH

the Strad PODCAST

Episode #106: 3D learning and creative teaching with violinist Rachel Cooper bitly.ws/3aRnc

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On the beat

News and events from around the world this month

Read all the breaking news in the string world online www.thestrad.com

Road to nowhere?

Touring to Europe is about to become even more difficult for UK ensembles, now that Orchestra Tax Relief from the government will no longer be an option

By Peter Somerford

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra's tour truck

British orchestras already burdened by extra costs and administration due to Brexit now face the prospect of not being able to claim tax relief on performances in the European Economic Area (the EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway). From 1 April the UK government is set to make EEA expenditure ineligible for Orchestra Tax Relief (OTR). The government says that narrowing the OTR qualifying criteria to just UK-based activities is necessary to comply with World Trade Organization rules, now that the UK is no longer part of the EU single market.

OTR was introduced in 2016 to support live orchestral performances. It allows orchestras to claim tax relief on their production costs and reduce their corporation tax bill if they make a profit or receive a tax credit if they make a loss. OTR can be worth up to 20 per cent of an orchestra's core production costs, and between 2016 and 2022 a total of £75m was paid out in OTR claims. The headline OTR rate was doubled in October 2021 to 50 percent, and the government extended this uplift for two years from 2023 to 2025 to help the sector recover post-Covid. The rate is due to taper down from April 2025, reducing to 35 per cent and then, from April 2026, returning to the original 25 per cent.

Hanna Madalska-Gayer, the head of policy and communications at the Association of British Orchestras (ABO), says that for UK orchestras that tour to the EEA, the amount that they can claim through OTR almost always outstrips the cost of other Brexit impacts, such as obtaining ATA Carnets for instruments and equipment, and the cabotage requirements for transporting instruments and equipment by lorry. 'Cabotage can cost some orchestras £30,000 just for hiring a truck for a European tour, or £16,000 a day when you factor in costs such as waiting for a van to go back and forth to the UK, or having musicians waiting in hotel rooms,' says Madalska-Gayer. 'But the OTR element can run into hundreds of thousands of pounds on EEA touring. For orchestras that tour to the EEA extensively, the income is significant because it supports activity elsewhere, including in the UK. Earnings lost from not being able to claim relief on touring costs incurred in the EEA could include fees that would have been paid out to UK freelance musicians, for example, or income that would have gone into funding UK community projects.'

The Musicians Union (MU) is also concerned that the change to EEA eligibility for OTR will be another hit to orchestras' bottom lines, and a threat to musicians' pay and conditions. MU assistant general secretary Phil Kear says: 'Increasingly, orchestras in the UK are finding huge pressure on their finances due to the lack of increase in arts

COURTESY CBSO

'EU touring is more challenging than it was pre-Covid' – *Tom Kiehl, interim chief executive, UK Music*

funding when compared with inflation and the significant increases in their supply chain costs. Anything like this OTR change, which further increases the financial pressure on orchestras, is likely to see us struggle even more to achieve rates of pay and conditions for our members that keep pace with the cost of living. In some cases it could potentially result in further instances of redundancies or orchestras being forced out of business altogether.'

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO), which toured Germany and Switzerland in October 2023 and will tour on the continent again this month, is among the big UK orchestras to benefit significantly from OTR. The CBSO director of finances and resources Sally Munday says: 'OTR makes an enormous contribution overall to the operation of the orchestra. At the current 50 percent rate, we're reclaiming tax relief to the tune of £2.5m a year, in the context of a total turnover of £11m.' The removal of EEA eligibility for OTR will have consequences for the orchestra, she adds: 'I don't believe it would affect our artistic decision whether to tour in Europe or not, but financially it would mean we would have to make cutbacks or savings in other areas. Part of what OTR has enabled the CBSO to do is create pioneering work, diversify our output and reach wider audiences.'

Having campaigned successfully for the OTR uplift in 2023, the ABO is pressing the government to maintain the 50 per cent rate beyond 2025. 'Sustaining the uplifted rate permanently is what the sector needs, and is what we've been pushing for since the day it was extended,' says Gadalska-Mayer. 'Keeping the rate at 50 per cent would more than help mitigate the effects of making EEA expenditure ineligible for relief.' Tom Kiehl, interim chief executive of UK Music, echoes this call to make the OTR extension permanent. 'Post-Covid, orchestras can tour and perform again, but we are now operating in a different environment,' he says. 'That's partly because EU touring is more challenging than it was pre-Covid. And this alone is surely an argument that we shouldn't revert back to previous levels of OTR.'

In 2019 ABO member orchestras made 150 visits to 22 different EEA countries. The organisation is researching data on international touring post-Covid to establish a more up-to-date picture of European touring, but Madalska-Gayer says: 'Throughout the post-Brexit period, UK orchestras have shown incredible resilience. New rules and processes have meant extra costs and administrative burdens for orchestras, but EU touring has not stopped.' Faced, however, with those increased costs of undertaking tours in Europe, along with wider economic challenges, UK orchestras will be hoping that the 50 per cent OTR rate continues beyond April 2025.

COURTESY FEDOR RUDIN

NEWS IN BRIEF

Fedor Rudin loaned 1712 Stradivari bit.ly/49gAWfn
Violinist Fedor Rudin (*left*) has been loaned the 1712 'ex-Viotti' Stradivari violin from Groupe Canimex. The loan marks the end of his relationship with his previous instrument, a 1779 Storioni violin loaned by the Deutsche Stiftung Musikleben. 'Although I will miss this violin greatly, I am very grateful to the Groupe Canimex for recently loaning me another incredible instrument,' Rudin said on social media.

Double bass smashed beyond repair by Qantas Airways bit.ly/3OfXa8V
Australian double bassist Mark Elton has reported that his instrument has been smashed beyond repair in transit from Melbourne to Perth via Qantas Airways. According to Elton, he only became aware of the damage after opening his flight case on arrival, and argues that the airline should have notified him of any accidents, in addition to issuing an apology. 'After many years of being a club member and choosing to fly with Qantas I'm hoping you'll support me through this major emotional & financial setback,' he posted on Instagram.

Violinist Dmitry Sitkovetsky joins the Purcell School as a patron bit.ly/4bhyvdY
The Purcell School has announced violinist, conductor and transcriber Dmitry Sitkovetsky as its newest patron. 'It marks a new chapter in my professional life – a chance to share my good fortune of having grown up with the giants of the music world,' Sitkovetsky commented on his appointment.

Do you have a topical story concerning the string music world? Email us at **thestrad@thestrad.com**

OBITUARIES

MARCEL SAINT-CYR

Canadian cellist Marcel Saint-Cyr died on 30 December at the age of 85. A prominent chamber musician and teacher, he played a crucial role in the growth of chamber music in Canada, notably as a member of the Orford Quartet.

Saint-Cyr was born in Quebec City on 20 May 1938. He studied cello with Lucien Plamondon and Walter Joachim and continued his studies in Europe with André Navarra, Leo Koscielny, Paul Tortelier, Enrico Mainardi and in the US with Leonard Rose. He also played the viola da gamba and baryton.

Saint-Cyr was a founding member of the Orford Quartet in 1965, performing on six continents and more than 60 recordings before leaving in 1980.

As an educator, Saint-Cyr taught at the University of Toronto from 1968 to 1980 and the University of Montreal from 1981 to 1984, when he joined the faculty at McGill University. He led its chamber music department for over two decades and was greatly responsible for its growth.

Saint-Cyr was also the cellist of the Franz Joseph Trio and served as the cellist of the Franz Joseph Quartet of Montreal.

TUOMO HAAPANEN

Finnish violinist, tutor and conductor Tuomo Haapanen died on 8 January aged 99. Serving as a violin professor emeritus at the Sibelius Academy, he was considered one of Finland's leading violin pedagogues.

Haapanen was born in Helsinki on 29 December 1924. His father was Toivo Haapanen, the chief conductor of the Radio Symphony Orchestra. After initial piano studies, he took up the violin in the 1930s. He continued his violin studies at the Sibelius Academy from 1945 to 1948, becoming the first person in Finland to graduate with a violin diploma. He also studied in Paris with Léon Nauwinck and René Benedetti.

Haapanen played in the first violin section of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra for five years from 1953 and was second concertmaster from 1958 to 1962. He also served as concertmaster in the Helsinki Chamber Orchestra from 1951 to 1961.

Haapanen was the head violin teacher at the Turku Conservatory (formerly the Turku Music College) from 1962 to 1978, also serving as its principal from 1966. He began as violin professor at the Sibelius Academy in 1978 and became its principal in 1987. He conducted the Sibelius Academy Chamber Orchestra from 1981 to 1991.

Haapanen was the chairman of the Sibelius Competition from 1981 to 2001. He was awarded the Aksentti award of the Finnish Music Education Association in 1997 and the Finnish State Music Prize in 1999.

DEBORAH REEDER

US cellist Deborah Reeder died on 6 January at the age of 83. In 1971 she formed the Philadelphia Trio with violinist Barbara Sonies and pianist Elizabeth Keller, a group she performed with for decades, touring nationally and throughout Europe.

Born on 19 January 1940 in Pennsylvania, she attained her bachelor's and master's degrees in music performance with a scholarship from the Philadelphia Musical Academy, now the University of the Arts Philadelphia. Her teachers included Lorne Munroe, Orlando Cole and Luigi Silva.

Reeder was a member of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1973 to 1979, and performed with the Philadelphia Ballet Orchestra, the Philadelphia Concerto Soloists, the American Society of Ancient Instruments and the Princeton Chamber Orchestra. She was principal cellist of the Mozart Society of Philadelphia and the Opera Company of Philadelphia, now Opera Philadelphia, and in 1961 became a founder member of the Amado Quartet.

As an educator, Reeder taught cello and chamber music at Temple University and the University of the Arts Philadelphia, plus many other music schools and privately.

SIDNEY WEISS

Violinist Sidney Weiss died on 12 January aged 95. He served as concertmaster of the Los Angeles Philharmonic for 15 years, and in the same role for five years at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO).

Born in 1928, Weiss was educated at Chicago Musical College and DePaul University. While a music student, he met his future wife Jeanne, a pianist, with whom he formed a violin–piano duo. They recorded Elgar and Walton violin sonatas, as well as the Mendelssohn and Haydn Double Concertos.

Weiss became concertmaster at the CSO in 1967. Alongside his orchestral role he performed extensively in the Weiss Duo in the US and on two European tours. In 1972 the pair moved to Europe to pursue their solo and duo-recital careers full-time.

In 1973 Weiss was appointed concertmaster of the Orchestre National de l'Opéra de Monte Carlo. He held the position until 1979, when he was invited to become the principal concertmaster with the LA Phil, a position he held until 1994.

Jeanne Weiss died in July 2022. In addition to his violin playing, Weiss was also a violin and bow maker, and conductor of the Glendale Symphony Orchestra.

TSCHU HO LEE

Korean–US violin maker and educator Tschu Ho Lee died on 4 January in Chicago, IL, US, aged 91.

Lee was born in Seoul, South Korea, in 1932. He trained as a violinist and sculptor and eventually merged the two interests to become a violin maker. He studied at Mittenwald, Germany, in the 1960s and later worked for Josef Kantuscher.

Lee moved to Chicago in 1970 to work for Kenneth Warren & Son, and in 1980 became the director of the school now known as the Chicago School of Violin Making. He was appointed director emeritus in 2003 and made over 300 instruments.

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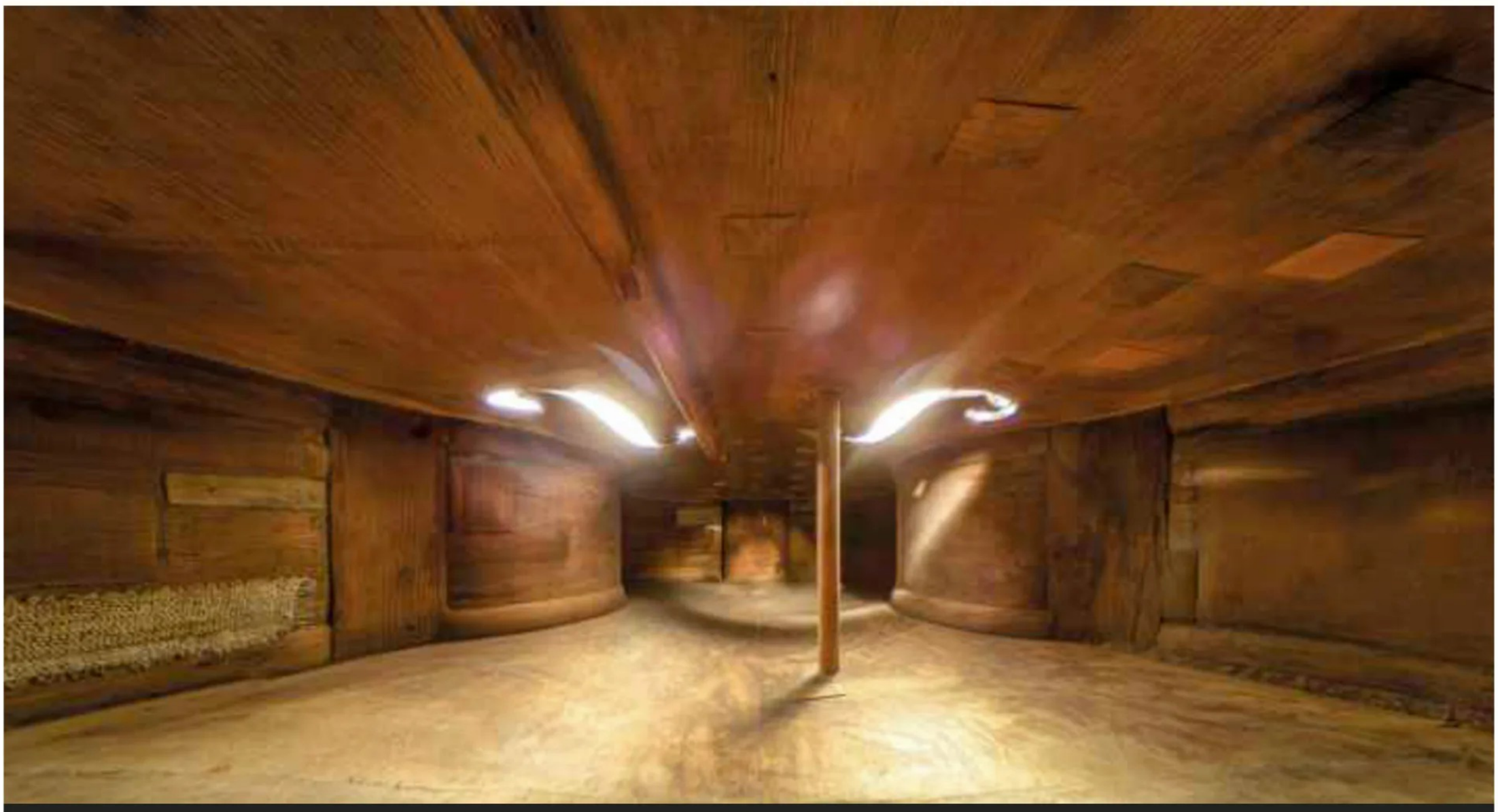

INSIDE INFORMATION: Illuminated solely by light from the f-holes, the interior of a 1705 Francesco Gofriller cello takes on the appearance of a vast, resonant concert hall. Currently played by Rolf Gjelsten of the New Zealand String Quartet (NZSQ), the instrument was once owned by Alexandre Barjansky, whose playing on this cello inspired Ernest Bloch to compose his *Schelomo*. All four of the NZSQ's instruments – including violins by Pietro Guarneri of Venice and Lorenzo Storioni, and a Nicolò Amati viola – have been transformed by photographer Charles Brooks, who says: 'The cello stands out for its unique poplar back, a deviation from the typical spruce.' Photo: Charles Brooks/www.architectureinmusic.com

PREMIERE *of the* MONTH

Making a difference

A new viola-focused quintet based on musical contrasts

COMPOSER **Errollyn Wallen**
WORK **String Quintet**
ARTISTS **Shiry Rashkovsky (viola) Solem Quartet**
DATE **17 March 2024**
PLACE **Stratford St Mary Parish Church, Suffolk, UK** bitly.ws/39eP7

Errollyn Wallen

Solem Quartet

'The string quintet with two violas has famous precedents, but I'd like to bring something fresh to it,' says British composer Errollyn Wallen about her new string quintet, commissioned by violist Shiry Rashkovsky. The Solem Quartet will complete the ensemble. 'Shiry implied that she wanted solo elements to her part, so there are times where the viola steps out and other players weave around her. I also love to play with different groupings, so there will also be duets and so on,' she says.

The idea of contrasts is central to the 20-minute piece, which is conceived as one movement divided into sections. 'Some of this music is very vigorous and virtuosic, and then there are parts that are simpler and song-like,' she says. 'Contrast is something of a hallmark of my music – it can be very lyrical but also biting.' And, she explains, it is ultimately a feeling of 'fluidity' that brings the contrasting sections together.

About the composition process, she says: 'Even though my music might inspire images, it's always the notes themselves that I work with in almost an abstract way. It's about exploring the potential of the initial ideas.' Solem Quartet violist Stephen Upshaw, who has previously collaborated with Wallen, says, 'Errollyn's music is filled with enthusiasm, beauty and excitement, and she expertly blends musical styles in a way that is always fresh and engaging.'

'I really admire how each stringed instrument sounds individual in every player's hands,' says Wallen about writing for strings. 'You have to compose for the people playing, and that matters a lot to me. I hope that with this piece, Shiry Rashkovsky and the Solem Quartet have something they can really make their own. The challenge has been trying to create the utmost drama for these five players.'

WALLEN PHOTO GRANT SMITH. QUARTET PHOTO BERTIE WATSON

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Head of Jury: David Geringas
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Age limit: 29 years
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COMPETITIONS

Viatores Quartet

Hilary Hahn

Julia Hagen

❶ Brazilian violinist **Nathan Amaral**, 28, has won the $50,000 first prize at the **Sphinx Competition**'s senior division in Detroit, MI, US. Second prize of $20,000 and the $5,000 audience prize went to US bassist Aaron Olguin, 29, and US violinist Bethlehem Kelley, 22, won third prize of $10,000. In the junior division, US violinist **Ana Isabella España** received the $10,000 first prize and concert engagements, US violinist Rebecca Beato took the second prize and $5,000, while US cellist Sonya Moomaw won the $3,000 third prize.

❷ The **Viatores Quartet** has received the €6,000 first prize at the **Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy University Competition** in Berlin, Germany. The quartet comprises violinists Louisa Staples, 23, and Patricio Velásquez Cárdenas, 28, violist Kwan Hon Gordon Lau, 24, and cellist Umut Sağlam, 25. The Nerida Quartet won the €4,000 second prize, while third prize of €2,000 was shared between the Eden and Sapphō quartets.

❸ US violinist **Hilary Hahn** has received the **Avery Fisher Prize** of $100,000 for outstanding artistic achievement and leadership in classical music. The award was conferred at the David Geffen Hall in the Lincoln Center, NY, US, following Hahn's performance of Prokofiev's Violin Concerto no.1 with the New York Philharmonic. Hahn previously won the prize in 1995 aged 15.

❹ Austrian cellist **Julia Hagen**, 28, has won the **Credit Suisse Young Artist Award**, receiving CHF75,000 (£68,400) and a solo performance with the Vienna Philharmonic. The award recognises young musical figures for extraordinary achievements, and has previously been won by Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Sol Gabetta, Vilde Frang and Kian Soltani.

FORTHCOMING COMPETITIONS & AWARDS

Joseph Joachim Violin Competition in Hannover, Germany, for violinists aged 18–34. First prize €30,000. **Deadline** 31 March; competition 15–28 September **Web** jjv-hannover.de/en

Princess Astrid International Music Competition in Trondheim, Norway, for violinists under 30. First prize NOK160,000 (£11,700). **Deadline** 5 April; competition 9–12 September **Web** tso.no/competition

Beethoven's Hradec in Opava, Czech Republic, for violinists aged 30 and under. First prize CZK80,000 (£2,800). **Deadline** 10 April; competition 12–16 June **Web** beethovenuvhradec.cz/en

APPOINTMENTS

- Dutch–Swiss cellist **Anton Spronk** has been named solo cellist of the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra
- South Korean violinist **Jin Suk 'Jason' Yu** has been appointed as the assistant principal second violin of the Cleveland Orchestra
- Violist **Wenting Kang** and cellist **Julie Albers** have been appointed to the New England Conservatory faculty, beginning in autumn 2024
- The Berkshire Bach Society has announced violinist **Eugene Drucker** as its new artistic director

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HAGEN PHOTO SIMON PAULY. VIATORES QUARTET PHOTO DENIZ TUNÇER. HAHN PHOTO O.J. SLAUGHTER

FEATURED PRODUCT

PEGS

The full set

New pegs finish off a complete range of ebony-alternative fittings

'The goal was always to offer a full range of fittings, and now we have finally arrived,' says Boris Haug from W-Fittings about the new Ebonprex pegs. The Swiss company, which was to created to test prototypes made from tropical hardwood alternatives, began using Ebonprex in 2021. It subsequently embarked on making a full set of fittings out of the material, the latest and final in the range being pegs for violin, viola and cello.

W-Fittings is the only company to use Ebonprex for fittings. The material is made of a beechwood laminate and is densified using resin (between each 0.8mm sheet) and heat. The wood is sourced from German forests and processed in northern Italy. 'The beech is glued in the same direction, so you can work it like a normal piece of ebony and with the same tools,' Haug says. 'It's a little denser than ebony and the fibres are straighter, so avoids the headaches you can get from today's ebony supply, which is poorer than in the decades before.' For the pegs specifically, the Ebonprex is ideal because of its similarity to rosewood, which is the more popular choice for pegs, he says. 'It is smooth, much more stable and doesn't alter with humidity as much.

'When you're aware of the devastating impact of robbing ecosystems of plants crucial to their health, you want to make sure you're not a part of it and that your trade is aware of it,' Haug says about the importance of using tropical hardwood alternatives. 'And now that there's a full set of fittings, you don't need to worry about availability.' Considering the growing amount of certification paperwork needed for tropical hardwoods, alternatives are all the more appealing, he explains. And unlike other alternatives, the pricing for Ebonprex is similar to ebony. 'I'm confident that these alternative materials have a bright future.'

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Life lessons

Christopher Hanulik

The US double bassist on his early influences and lessons learnt from his nearly four decade-long principal position at the LA Philharmonic

The teacher I must give the most credit to is Homer Mensch, with whom I studied for eight years at the Juilliard School from my teens. He had a profound effect on me not only as a bass player but also as a person. He was tremendously warm and the way he dealt with others helped me become who I am today. In terms of bass playing, sound was the most important thing for him. In the same way that everybody's voice is unique, he thought your sound had to be too. He worked tirelessly on developing my right hand and my individual voice. In an orchestra there are only about eight to ten basses, so it's important to have that extra gear in sound production. It's not just about volume but also colour.

I also have to give credit to my father, who was a musician himself. I would play for him a lot and he wasn't shy about giving his opinion! I remember once playing for him and being really happy with how I had played. He sat there and said, 'You need to stop thinking about being a good bass player and always think about being a good musician.' It struck me, and I've since carried that with me wherever I go. It's easy to get wrapped up in what we do technically, but it's critical for us to be always looking outwards too.

Performing with the LA Phil in 2009

MAIN PHOTO COURTESY LA PHIL. INSET PHOTO MATHEW IMAGING

After my time in New York I needed something new, and moved to Los Angeles to be a section bass player in the LA Philharmonic. A few years afterwards I became co-principal. I'll be the first to admit that I was a bit gung-ho at first! I thought I needed to take charge, which was probably the worst thing to do because I was playing in a section with guys who already knew exactly what they were doing. Being a good leader is all about listening. I like to run my section in a cooperative way and want everyone to feel engaged. Whether that means they can suggest bowing or how to do things differently, it's about providing a stable platform on which they can operate best.

The standard of playing nowadays is so high that playing the right notes isn't enough any more to win positions in orchestras. And unfortunately there just isn't enough space for everybody. It's a real gut punch for those who get to the final stages but don't get the job. I try to encourage them to keep going, but that's easy for me to say! Ultimately my main piece of advice is not to close yourself off to what's around you. This is one of the reasons I can't see myself anywhere other than the LA Phil, and have stayed for almost four decades, because the players take risks and are constantly evolving. When you're aware of what surrounds you, you'll be surprised by what you hear.

It's critical for us to be always looking outwards

INTERVIEW BY RITA FERNANDES

LEADING FROM BEHIND

While the musicians at the front of an orchestral string section might be in the spotlight, every string player should experience the unique challenges of sitting towards the back, says violinist **Alexandra Gorski**

There has long been a false assumption in orchestral string sections that the most demanding roles and greatest challenges in an ensemble reside in the leading positions or front desks. Contrary to common opinion, performing from a position at the back of an orchestra can actually be more difficult than sitting at the front of a section or leading.

All player positions in a string section are demanding, have intricate parts and are integral to the group, yet there are differences between the responsibilities of a section tutti player and those of a leader. Exploring the dynamics of orchestral seating within a string section allows us to shed light on the nuanced difficulties unique to musicians in the rear rows, challenging the conventional belief that the front ranks bear the greatest burden.

Of course, the leaders and the first few desks are in a more visible position within the orchestra, and are more exposed to the conductor (and in most cases, to the audience) both visibly and in their sound projection. Playing orchestral solos, providing clear cues and having direct communication with the conductor and other orchestral sections are all demands unique to sitting in the first few chairs.

Although the rest of the section may not share those same responsibilities, there are separate challenges that are exclusive to those playing in the back desks. When sitting further back in a section, the most evident obstacle is distance: there can be a loss of connection or a feeling of detachment in being far from the section leaders and the conductor. Visibility plays a vital role when performing in an orchestra, and those near the back may have greater difficulty in seeing essential information, like the conductor's gestures and cues, or the bow distribution and placement of their section leaders.

Interpreting the conductor's directions while contending with limited visibility and detachment from the section leaders forces players at the back to be even more alert and reactive than their front-desk counterparts. In addition to relying on the conductor, those at the back must also depend on their internal pulse, peripheral vision and the cues of fellow musicians to maintain synchroneity within the section.

Then there are the challenges of sound production and balance. Players at the back are positioned more deeply within the orchestra, immersed in a different sonic landscape from those in the more isolated first few stands. They must contend with the projection of all their neighbouring colleagues: woodwind, brass, percussion, a large proportion of other string sections – in other words, an abundance of additional voices. They must navigate through the thicker layers of the sounds around them while achieving a resonant and balanced contribution, not only to their section but also to the collective sound of the ensemble. Orchestral musicians are constantly challenged with alternating between the projection and integration of their sound within the group, and although that can prove problematic from anywhere in an orchestra, it is substantially more difficult when playing near the back.

The strength of a section is not just in its leaders, but in the unity of the whole group

Observing the different demands of playing in each seat in an orchestra allows players to appreciate that every position, from the first to the final few desks, demands the full engagement and dedication of its musicians. The strength of a section is not just in its leaders, but in the unity and commitment of the whole group, and by exploring the same section from various chairs, orchestral members can become more well-rounded and adept musicians.

The peak of culture

Cross-cultural and intergenerational exchange is the engine that drives cellist Trey Lee's Musicus Fest, as **Thomas May** discovered at its eleventh edition

Cloud-piercing skyscrapers nestled amid sea, mountains and lush green spaces: Hong Kong is a captivating marvel of stunning yet harmonious contrasts. This densely populated, cosmopolitan metropolis surrounded by the South China Sea is best known as a financial hub and magnet for shoppers and culinary adventurers.

It's also an environment particularly well suited to Musicus Society's mission of promoting cross-cultural collaboration. '"East meets West" might be a cliché elsewhere, but in Hong Kong, it is literally what happens,' said cellist Trey Lee, artistic director of the Hong Kong society he co-founded with his sister Chui-Inn Lee in 2010. 'This may even be the original East-meets-West centre of the world.'

Hong Kong from Victoria Peak

Although he has long been based in Berlin, Lee is also a musical thought leader who maintains tight connections with his native Hong Kong. He resolved to establish Musicus Society as a result of his personal experience studying abroad (initially in the US, subsequently across Europe). 'One thing that always struck me when I worked with other musicians or won competitions was that nobody was expecting to meet a cellist from Hong Kong,' Lee explained during my visit. 'Hong Kong has so many young people studying classical music; I think the world needs to know that the city is not just a business and finance capital.'

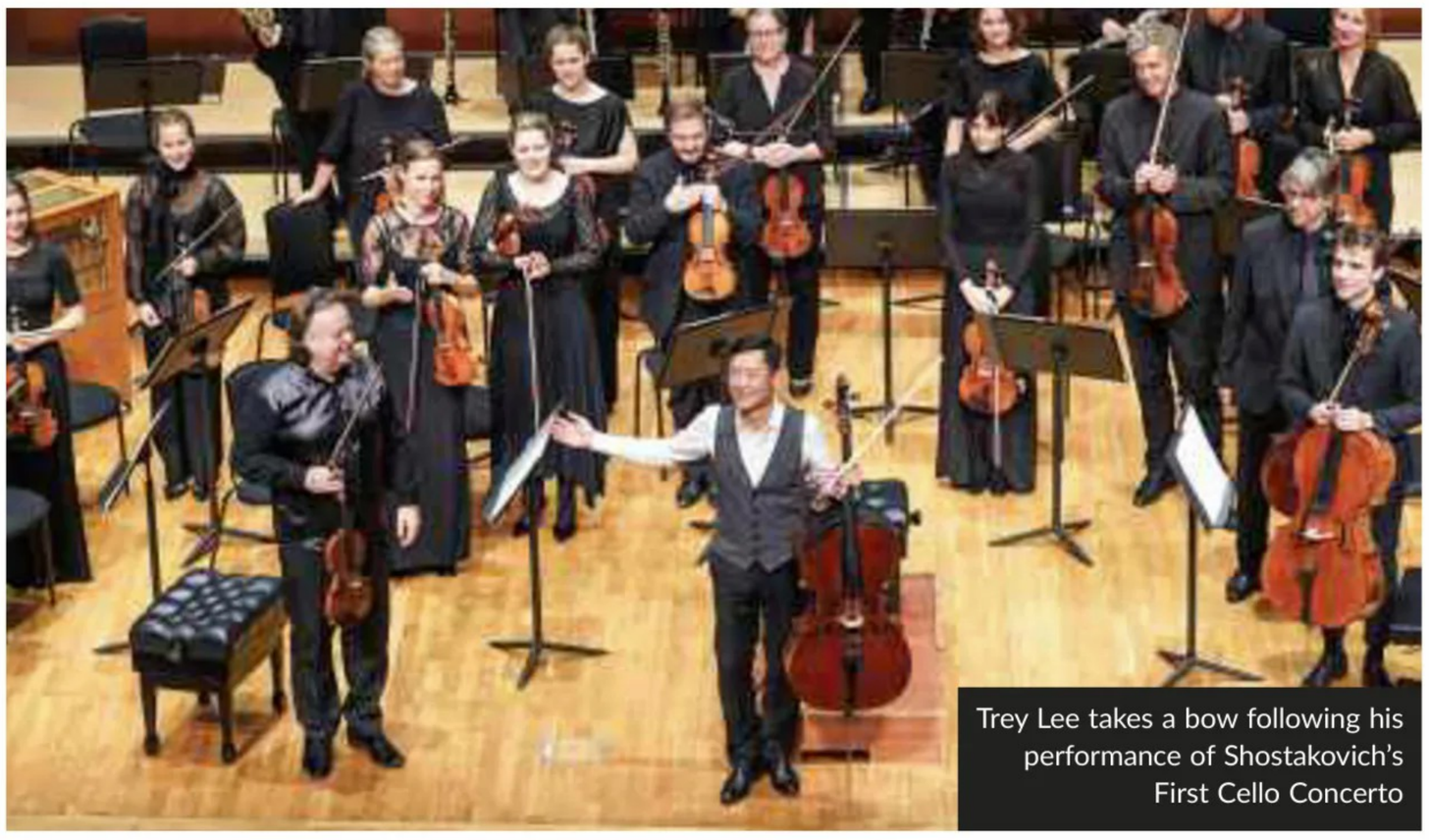
Musicus Society operates with an annual budget of approximately HK$10.85m (£1.09m); 39 per cent comes from the local government, while the Hong Kong Jockey Club (a vestige of British colonial days) is also a prominent sponsor. Along with year-round educational initiatives, the society presents Musicus Fest, its flagship celebration of international musical partnerships. The festival, launched in 2013, places a strong emphasis on string players in solo and chamber ensemble configurations and is held annually in late autumn – an especially favourable time to visit Hong Kong. Picture-perfect weather and balmy temperatures accompanied my stay at the end of November.

Musicus Fest offers events catering to various audience types, from youngsters to casual tourists, though the concerts also appeal to different constituencies at the same time. The festival had officially opened the week before I arrived with an interactive family concert (Marco Polo's Musical Encounter of East and West, on 11 November) juxtaposing Chinese and Western instruments in an imaginary trip to Carnival in Venice; but a nice mix of parents and remarkably well-behaved, attentive children also attended the performances that made up the main part of the festival, together with music students, followers of the 'arts and culture youth' movement (young adults who seek out cultural experiences in lieu of social media saturation) and an assortment of local and visiting concertgoers.

Hong Kong beckons with a cornucopia of readily accessible sites and activities between concerts. Simply navigating the area's superbly organised modes of public transport was reliably eye-opening, with panoramic glimpses of the endlessly intriguing cityscape from the ferries, close-ups of Hong Kong's density and architectural variety from the double-decker trams. A breathtakingly steep funicular ascent to Victoria Peak rewarded with views the Olympian gods might envy.

Back at sea level 500m below, the eleventh edition of Musicus Fest highlighted two chamber ensembles: the Musicus Soloists Hong Kong (MSHK) (21 November); and Camerata Salzburg, which made its Musicus Fest debut in

GETTY/F9PHOTOS



Trey Lee takes a bow following his performance of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto

two separate programmes (25 and 26 November). Also included was a solo recital by violinist Aaron Chan (24 November), the 2023 winner of the society's Young Artist Audition.

The three ensemble concerts and the earlier family concert took place in the comfortable, 1,430-seat Concert Hall at Hong Kong City Hall on the north side of Hong Kong Island. A few knowledgeable local music lovers mentioned that its acoustics are superior to those of the main hall in the Hong Kong Cultural Centre on the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront across Victoria Harbour. The solo recital took place in the smaller, 463-seat theatre.

Comprising some twenty members, MSHK is a chamber orchestra of young string players originally from Hong Kong who travel from around the world – from leading conservatoires or places where they've established a solo career – to convene at Musicus Fest as well as for tours abroad. Lee initiated the group in November 2022, modelling it on such ensembles as the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the Australian Chamber Orchestra. He envisions it as a cultural ambassador for Hong Kong in its appearances beyond the festival; it has already toured to Berlin and Weimar, with a programme inspired by the themes of Bauhaus architecture and philosophy.

Along with cross-cultural exchange, a key objective for Lee is the intergenerational communication of traditions and musical knowledge. He recalls how being able to play next to leading musicians during his own early years allowed his artistry to blossom. When visiting artists just turned up for a concert and then jetted away, on the other hand, it 'seemed like a missed opportunity'. So he decided to make the contact between guest stars and the young musicians fostered by Musicus Society an integral aspect of Musicus Fest. A salient example in 2023 was the MSHK programme curated by French-Canadian pianist Louis Lortie. He not only played the solo part in a fascinating arrangement of Grieg's Piano Concerto with string orchestra accompaniment, but also coached the musicians in the other pieces by an array of Nordic composers.

'It's inspiring to have this communication with a new generation,' Lortie told me after the final rehearsal. 'They're very, very different from the older generation.' Talking about the work he was doing with them, he said, 'It's wonderful training for these young people. But it can also be very difficult for them, because there are a lot of things in music that cannot be explained rationally. This is a different way of listening to things.' The chamber music-like intimacy achieved by the ensemble was particularly admirable both in the unusual Grieg arrangement and in the meaningful pacing of the mystically tinged *Fratres* of Arvo Pärt in a version for solo violin, strings and percussion (with exquisite contributions from soloist Angela Chan). MSHK members violinist Fan Hiu-sing (Young Artist Audition winner, 2021) and double bassist Victor Lee described the chance to work with like-minded colleagues and eminent mentors as a prime motivation for their participation. Fan Hiu-sing also took the spotlight with violinist Jeremy Hao (Young Artist Audition winner, 2020) in the closing concert – the second of the two programmes featuring Camerata Salzburg – for a rare, gracefully balletic account of Mozart's Concertone in C major K190.

Trey Lee himself, playing his 1703 'Comte de Gabriac' Gofriller, performed as the soloist in the first Camerata Salzburg concert, balancing intensity and dark rumination in his deeply personal interpretation of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto. Guest concertmaster Gernot Süssmuth elsewhere guided the conductorless ensemble in dramatically alert accounts of Mendelssohn's 'Hebrides' Overture and Beethoven's Seventh Symphony and, in the final concert, shaped an especially perky Mozart 'Jupiter' Symphony.

Süssmuth and several other string playing colleagues from Camerata Salzburg also devoted time to working with Musicus Society's Ensemble Training students – a cohort of talented school-age musicians which played side by side with the Austrian ensemble in the final piece of the festival, Leó Weiner's zesty Divertimento no.1. Shifting from formal black to bright scarlet tops, the combined players joined across cultural and generational divides to spark renewed hope in the potential of music to communicate a shared vision.

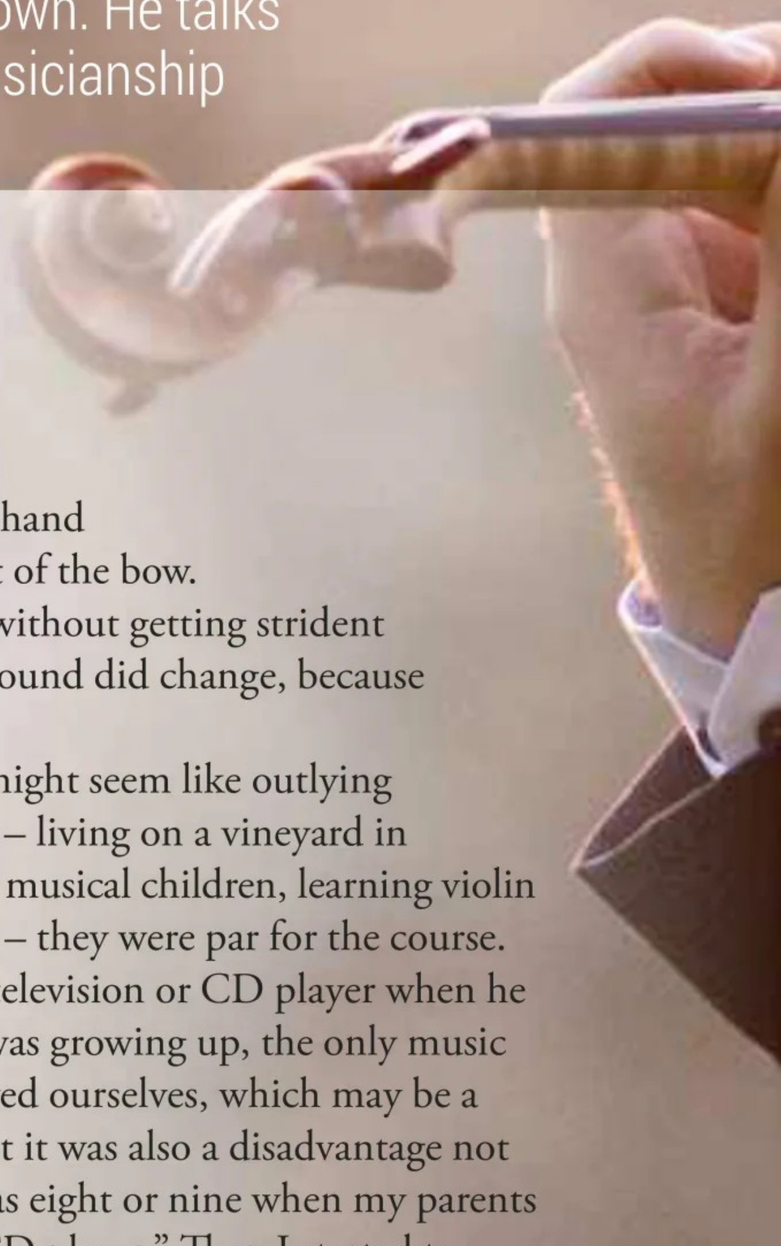
'HONG KONG MAY BE THE ORIGINAL EAST-MEETS-WEST CENTRE OF THE WORLD' – *TREY LEE, CELLIST*

PHOTO COURTESY OF MUSICUS SOCIETY

AUGUSTIN HADELICH

‘JUST LET THE MUSIC SPEAK’

The virtuoso violinist Augustin Hadelich defies categorisation; he is the product of several cultures that he draws on to produce a sound that is distinctly his own. He talks to **Ariane Todes** about his influences and how he developed his unique musicianship



It’s Thanksgiving Day when I talk to Augustin Hadelich over Zoom. He’s in a hotel room in Cleveland, Ohio, between rehearsals and performances of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with the Cleveland Orchestra, and it doesn’t look like he’ll get any turkey or trimmings. He doesn’t seem to mind, though. Born in Cecina, Italy, in 1984, to German parents, he took up US citizenship in 2014, and the celebration is not yet part of his psyche. ‘It’s a fun holiday because families get together,’ he says, ‘but it’s not something that I always did from an early age, like it is for Americans.’

Maybe it’s good that he hasn’t entirely absorbed his adopted culture yet. To my ears, Hadelich’s playing brings together the best qualities of both American and European playing: passion, polish and coherence, but also thoughtfulness, expressivity and nuance. He’s not having any of my oversimplification, though: ‘I’m not sure there is an American sound. You could say there’s a Russian sound – but actually, Russian players have such different sounds, so that, too, would be a generalisation. I think the influences on my sound are Italian and German. The violinist I first liked was Uto Ughi [one of Hadelich’s earliest teachers]. He has a very lyrical, singing way of playing, and I always thought that was beautiful. The German influence may be due to the fact that Schubert and Schumann songs were some of the earliest music I got to know. There’s a way of singing and letting the voice ring and be expressive that really resonates with me.’

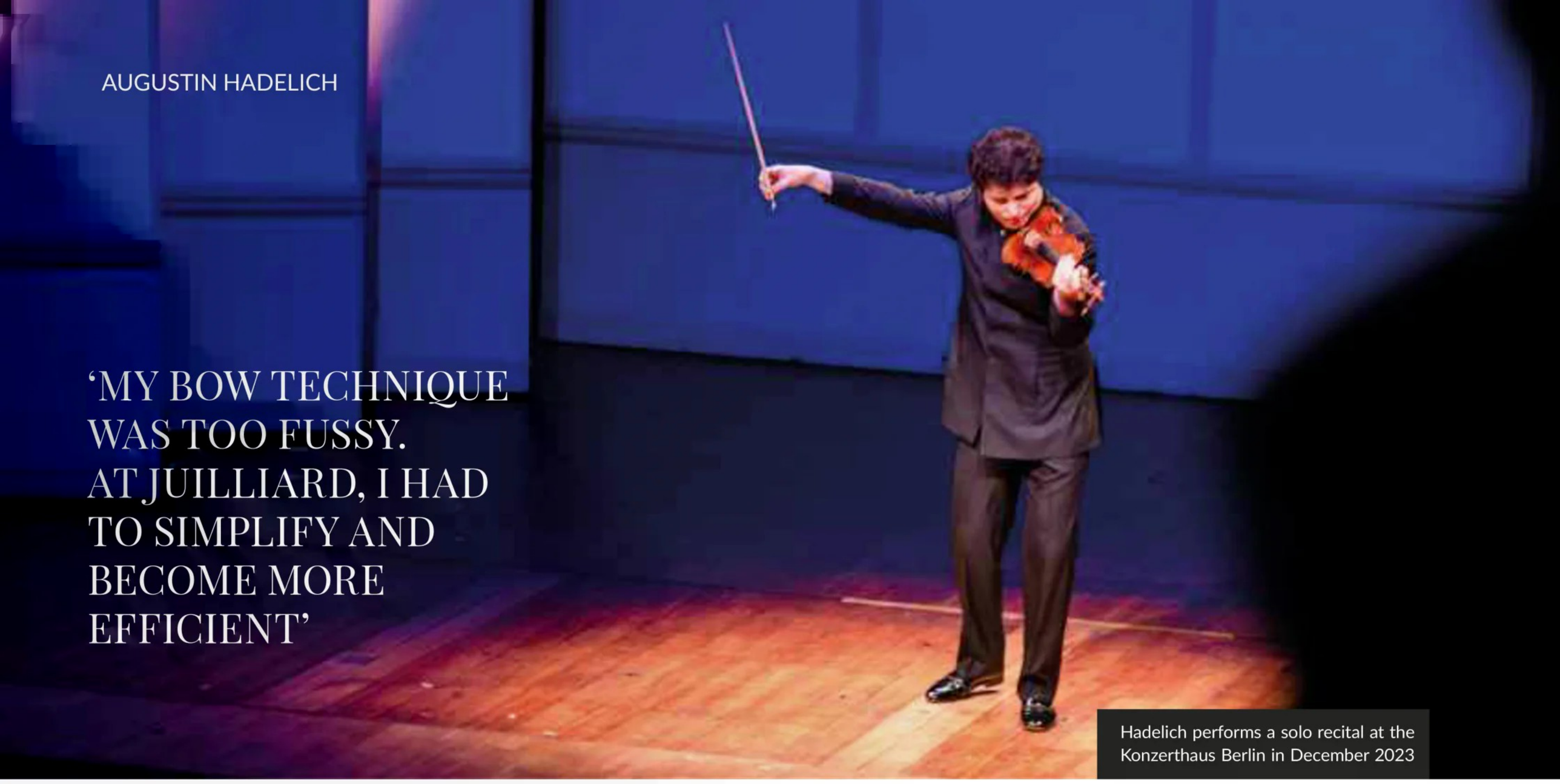
He admits, however, that his sound did develop in the US: ‘What changed in America, when I came to study at Juilliard [with Joel Smirnoff], is that I figured out my bow technique. They were teaching that well – how to have a sensible, efficient right-hand technique that uses the weight of the bow. You learn how to play loudly without getting strident or aggressive. As a result, my sound did change, because I’m able to make it richer.’

A young Hadelich plays for Uto Ughi

Ughi and German Lieder might seem like outlying inspirations, but for Hadelich – living on a vineyard in Tuscany, the youngest of three musical children, learning violin with his amateur-cellist father – they were par for the course. His family didn’t even have a television or CD player when he started. He remembers, ‘As I was growing up, the only music in the house was what we played ourselves, which may be a good thing to some extent, but it was also a disadvantage not to hear professionals play. I was eight or nine when my parents finally said, “OK, let’s buy a CD player.” Then I started to listen a lot. As a result, I was heavily influenced by the people I could hear live, and that was mainly Uto Ughi.’

Perhaps this relative isolation explains why Hadelich has such a personal sound in an era when young violinists are often criticised for sounding alike – he had to figure things out for himself. ‘It made me listen very closely to myself, because I had a sense of when it didn’t sound good enough. Little by little you develop an idea of what you want to ▹

SUXIAO YANG. UGHI PHOTO COURTESY OF AUGUSTIN HADELICH



‘MY BOW TECHNIQUE WAS TOO FUSSY. AT JUILLIARD, I HAD TO SIMPLIFY AND BECOME MORE EFFICIENT’

Hadelich performs a solo recital at the Konzerthaus Berlin in December 2023

BERLIN PHOTO SUXIAO YANG. INDIANAPOLIS PHOTO DENIS RYAN KELLY JR

sound like. You start paying attention to all the little noises and imperfections between the notes and how to avoid those, and how to use the bow. Ultimately, this is probably what made my bow technique too fussy. At Juilliard, I had to simplify and become more efficient, but I think it was ingrained very deeply that I always looked for a sound.’

He was hardly living in a backwater, though: ‘Many classical musicians visit Tuscany, so in a funny way, it’s a great place to meet people, if you know where they are and when they’re going to be there.’ One of his great musical heroes was the Amadeus Quartet’s Norbert Brainin, who had a house nearby and taught in Fiesole. Hadelich had lessons with him as a twelve-year-old: ‘They were eye-opening, although I didn’t quite understand everything at the time. There were sometimes pieces he didn’t know well, but his approach was to look at the score or piano part to try to understand the whole thing. I hadn’t seen many teachers do that – they often just taught from the violin part.’

Brainin also cultivated a natural style of music making: ‘It made him very angry if you did something that was a cute effect, but artificial, which didn’t result from the music itself. It wasn’t about doing what the composer said literally; it was more that it needs to be a result of the music. There is a distinction. Some teachers might say, “OK, here it says crescendo so you have to make a crescendo.” It’s true that we should do what the composer says, but the other approach would be to ask, “Why is there a crescendo here?” and understand what’s going on underneath with the harmonies, which makes that crescendo necessary. I had just come from some lessons with Zakhar Bron, who would suggest things because they sounded good – a sudden effect or *piano* here or colour change there. It made Brainin quite upset. He would say, “Why are you doing this nonsense?” There was an understated simplicity in his approach. Just let the music speak.’

You can hear this philosophy in action in Hadelich’s performances, not least his Bach Sonatas and Partitas (2021), my favourite recording of the works of recent years – agile, detailed and expressive, but without the emphases, overphrasing and point-making that some players seem to regard as historical dues. I ask him where he draws the line when using urtext. He says: ‘It’s a sort of scavenger hunt for little details in the text. It’s really interesting and important, because sometimes you have choices to make. We have to know *why* something is different from how people used to play it, and to make informed decisions. That’s why the urtext is so important – to know what interpretative traditions were added later. With the old editions before urtext, you had no idea what was from the composer.’

There are limits, though: ‘It’s great that there is more close reading of sources nowadays, but it’s dangerous if that becomes a completely literal thing, with people saying, “This is now the source and this is exactly how you have to do this.” An important part of analysis is looking at how the piece was written, which ideas came first, how the composer filled them in – looking at the full score and analysing it harmonically and structurally. You realise that some composers aren’t so attentive about their dynamics. Brahms, for example, was incredibly thoughtful, so he often made sure there’s only one fortissimo and one pianissimo in a movement, so you know to show the peak and lowest points. But if it’s a composer who has fortissimos everywhere, like Mendelssohn or Dvořák, analysis of the piece and understanding of its structure will tell you more about the high and low points, which helps you interpret the markings.’

Although he was born in Europe, Hadelich’s career took off in North America first, following his first prize in the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis in 2006 and then an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2009. It’s only in recent years that he’s finally conquered his home continent. And how! This spring his schedule covers Germany, Belgium, Spain, Austria and Finland. ▹

Hadelich at the 2006 Indianapolis Competition

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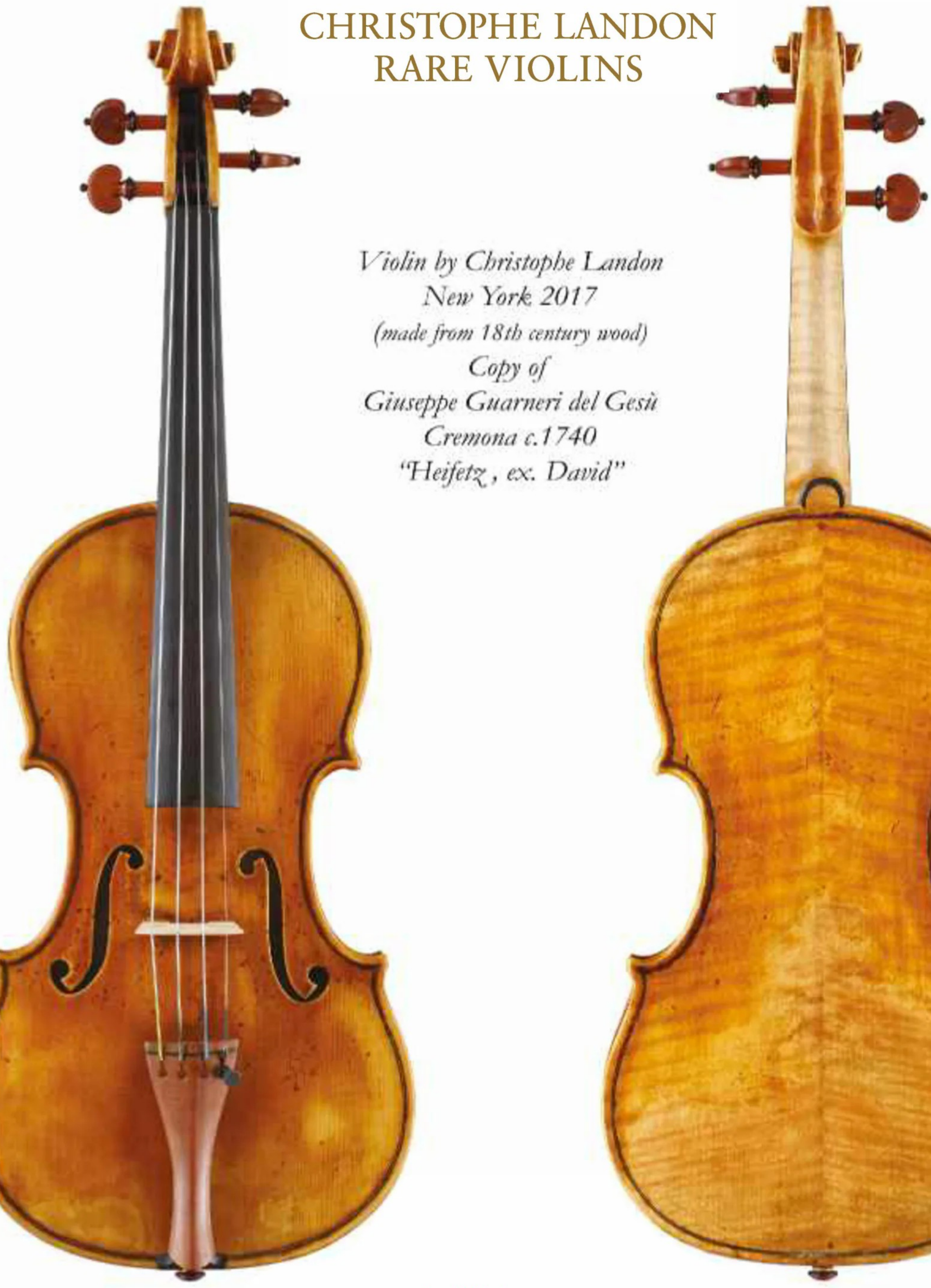

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Hadelich plays Berg's Violin Concerto with Andris Nelsons and the Vienna Philharmonic at the 2023 Salzburg Festival

‘SOME CONDUCTORS – IF THEY’VE PLAYED A LOT OF CHAMBER MUSIC – HAVE AN INTUITION ABOUT WHAT YOU’RE GOING TO DO NEXT. IT’S NOT AS SATISFYING WHEN CONDUCTORS JUST FOLLOW YOU’

He’s delighted by this development: ‘For many years I was mostly playing in North America, because my career started there. It is still my musical home, but I am very happy about playing more in Europe these days as well.’

His internet fame over lockdown must surely have contributed to breaking the European market finally. His videos became a regular highlight of those strange and isolating times as he shared his musical and technical insights with the utmost wisdom and fluency (just as he talks to me now). He was not the only violinist to do so, but he may have been the most consistent. He put out more than 50 ‘Ask Augustin’ sessions and has amassed more than 81,000 YouTube subscribers and 114,000 Instagram followers. Contemplate the statistics: 38,000 people have watched his ‘How to keep your left hand relaxed during fast passages’ video.

He is, however, sceptical about online presence being obligatory for a young player trying to build a career. ‘Social media becomes more important once you have success and a career, but I’m not sure that by itself it leads to success. If someone is famous on Instagram it doesn’t mean they’re going to get a lot of concerts. It’s more that some people who are Instagram-famous are playing lots of concerts and their Instagram following grows with that. You would be putting the cart before the horse to focus too much on social media to the detriment of other traditional aspects of career development, which still matter.’

What are these old-school ways? ‘The basic way a career develops healthily has to do with relationships with other musicians. People like playing with you and then they ask you to do more things with them. You play with a conductor who takes you somewhere else because he or she liked the collaboration. That’s how my career developed. The basic way a career develops hasn’t changed much. People need to want to hear you play, and to enjoy what you do and working with you.’

The list of leading conductors who want to collaborate with him is impressive. This spring they include Semyon Bychkov, Marin Alsop, Iván Fischer, Andris Nelsons and Jakub Hrůša. What has he learnt from the best? ‘When it works, it’s like chamber music. Some conductors – if they’ve played a lot of chamber music or if they’re experienced enough with soloists – have an intuition about what you’re going to do next, your phrasing. It’s not as satisfying when conductors just follow you. It can result in the orchestra being late to everything, and even when it’s together, it feels like everyone is just following the violinist. In some concertos that doesn’t work – when it’s more symphonic or like chamber music, like Brahms, Berg or even Tchaikovsky. A good interpretation is one where the violinist is actively listening all the time, reacting to the orchestra, and where the expression of the violin line is a result or reflection of what is happening underneath, resulting in changes of character and colour.’

The breadth of his repertoire as he tours is also remarkable, with concertos by Bach, Bartók, Brahms, Britten, Dvořák, Mozart, Prokofiev and Sibelius. There is a reason for this, he explains: ‘I enjoy every concert so much. An ideal career is one where I keep enjoying it this much and never get bored. This is why I don’t restrict myself to a few pieces each season. ▹

SUXIAO YANG

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with Augustin Hadelich

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Sometimes, it's too many – this season it's 18 concertos. I try to learn new things. If I had to play the Tchaikovsky Concerto 30 times in a row, at some point it would become routine. Even if it was pretty good, on some level people would sense that it's not as intense for me any more, whereas if I play lots of other pieces and return to Tchaikovsky, it's an exhilarating, intense experience. I think people can feel that, and I walk off stage excited, thinking it was an incredible experience for me, which I wouldn't if I only played that piece all the time.'

When I ask him how he keeps all these pieces on the boil simultaneously, he goes back to his unconventional musical upbringing: 'Growing up, there was a focus on learning lots of pieces rather than playing a piece perfectly. This ended up being one of my father's good ideas, but at the time, everyone said it was a mistake. With other kids, the teacher would insist, "You're going to play this piece for a year and perfect it," whereas my father said, "You've been playing the Mendelssohn for a few weeks and it's all right. Why don't you try this and why don't you try that?" And he kept putting music in front of me. By the time I was eleven, there may not have been a performance of which I would now say, "That was great," but I was learning so much music. You don't forget the music you learn as a child, so most of the concertos I have in my repertoire are works I memorised as a child. I still have to check my memory occasionally with these pieces, and prepare, but they are stored deep in my brain.'

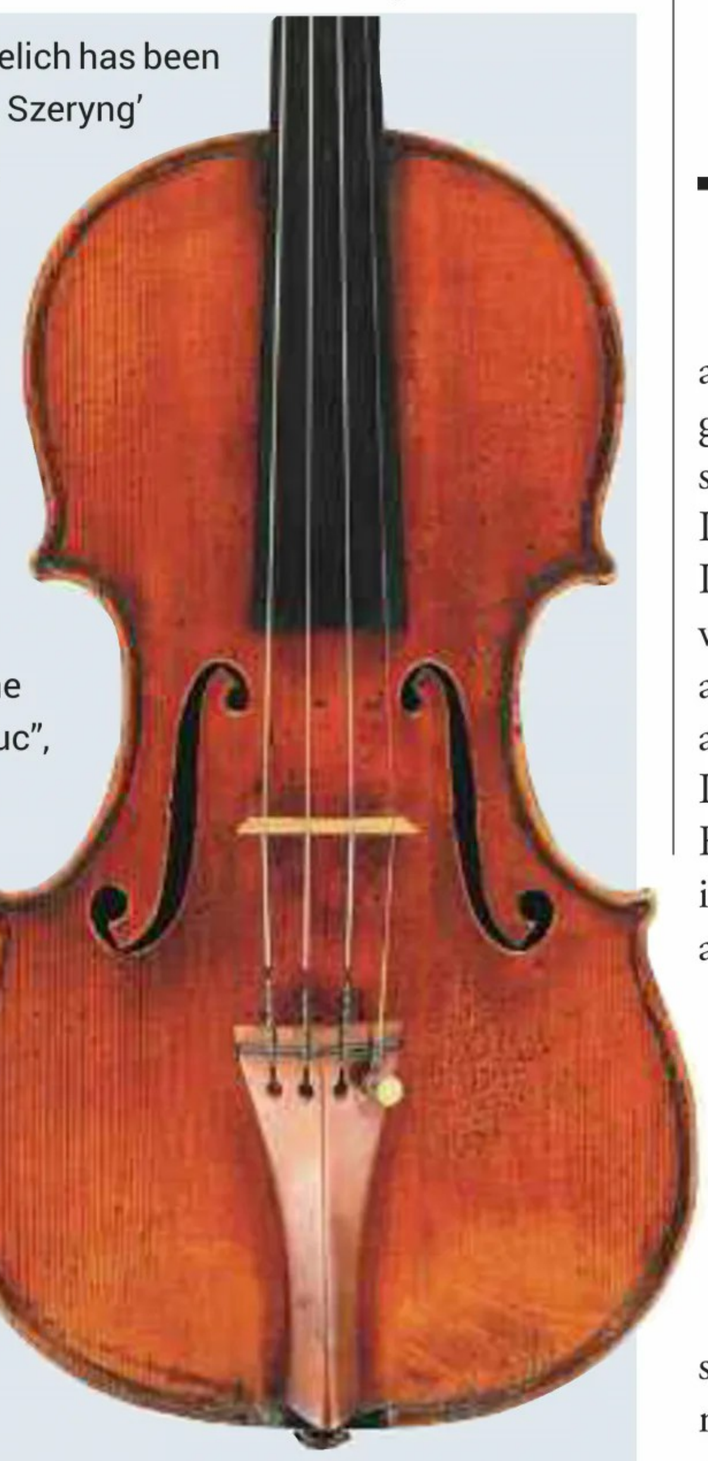
'MOST OF THE CONCERTOS I HAVE IN MY REPERTOIRE ARE WORKS I MEMORISED AS A CHILD. THEY ARE STORED DEEP IN MY BRAIN'

He also has a special trick: 'I've become quite disciplined about making notes after performances, especially if I'm not going to be playing that piece again for a while. I write down something a conductor said or some interesting new thing I thought or tried, which I don't want to forget. In this way, I'm able to get back quite quickly to the place where the piece was the last time I played it. I do this because I found early on, as I was juggling repertoire, that I would redo the same work and think, "I've discovered this new fingering," and then realise I had found it before but forgotten. That's just a waste of time. For me, it's about how I can immediately get everything back into my mind so I can resume work on a piece where I left off, and still have the freshness from having put it aside.'

As it's Thanksgiving when we talk, I ask him what he would give thanks for, if he were celebrating. 'There's a lot I'm grateful for. There are people who have helped me along the way and given me enormous amounts of time and advice, and that has helped me so much. And there's the support from my family, firstly from my parents and now from my wife. I'm also thankful that after the pandemic, which was such a depressing time, we are back together with other musicians, in front of audiences. I think about that almost every time I perform. I'm thankful I get to live my life with music like this.' There are growing numbers of people around the world who feel thankful for this too. ●

HADELICH'S VIOLINS

Since February 2020, Hadelich has been playing the c.1744 'Leduc, Szeryng' Guarneri 'del Gesù' (*right*), on loan from the Tarisio Trust. 'The sound of this violin has a richness and complexity that I have rarely heard in any instrument,' he said in 2020. 'Although I have often been more partial to the sound of Stradivari in the past, the moment I played the "Leduc", something in the sound drew me to the violin and I did not want to stop playing.' For the nine years prior to that, he played the 1723 'Kiesewetter' Stradivari (see this issue's cover), and from 2006–2010 he played the 1683 'ex-Gingold' Stradivari, as the standing first-prize winner of the Indianapolis Competition.



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LAURENCE LESSER

Laurence Lesser plays his 1622 Brothers Amati cello with a 2015 Benoit Rolland bow. He also owns a c.1810 Tourte bow

THE MAKING OF A CELLIST

Having recently celebrated his 85th birthday, cellist and pedagogue **Laurence Lesser** looks back on his formative influences and recalls some of the iconic 20th-century musicians he worked with

I was born in Los Angeles in 1938. My mother was a piano teacher. When I was very young I was taken to youth concerts and asked if I was interested in any particular instrument. I chose the double bass. My parents thought that was too big for me and instead got me a cello for my sixth birthday. Thus began a lifelong commitment to learn from that instrument how I could find my own voice.

My first teacher of any importance and length was Gregory Aller, a Russian immigrant from Moscow who settled in New York and then moved to Los Angeles in 1931 as a player and teacher. His cellist daughter Eleanor studied with him until she entered Juilliard (in 1934), where her teacher was Felix Salmond. Not long after returning home she met and married the violinist Felix Slatkin, thus forming the Hollywood power couple who created the Hollywood String Quartet.

Aller was an old-school cellist. He taught me scales and arpeggios, and etudes by Dotzauer and Duport. I was asked to keep my left knee behind the cello! He was a warm, caring person and I remember at my lessons there were two toddlers running around his apartment. They were his grandchildren and later they became famous as conductor Leonard Slatkin and cellist Frederick Zlotkin.

At the age of 13, I was in open revolt against my mother, who was forcing me in my cello studies. I simply stopped practising. Aller belonged to a club where chess player Jacqueline de Rothschild Piatigorsky was also a member. Her husband, cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, came often to watch her play. Aller told my parents that he would ask Piatigorsky if he would listen to me and give advice. When my parents told me I was going to play for him, I refused. But the day came and

CARLIN MA

Gregor Piatigorsky

I went unhappily and played with a huge chip on my shoulder. When I'd finished, Piatigorsky asked my parents why I looked so unhappy. They told him that I had not wanted to come there that day because I thought it meant I would have to become a professional cellist. He looked at me thoughtfully and said, 'Oh, Larry, what makes you think you *could* become a professional cellist?' My life's journey was settled by that question.

Piatigorsky said it was time for a new teacher, suggesting Gábor Rejtő, a Hungarian who had studied with Pablo Casals. The following summer, in 1953, I started working with him at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, continuing through my high-school years in pre-college at the University of Southern California (USC).

Rejtő was very musical and a warm person. He guided me through repertoire suitable for my age with special care for musical values, and took me through many Popper etudes. He also shared with me technical ideas he had learnt from Casals, including use of expressive intonation, the hammering of the left-hand fingers against the fingerboard and plucking with the left hand while playing a bowed note, the latter two of which Casals believed would set the string in motion. I kept exploring the intonation and the plucking, but later gave up on the hammering. Rejtő also thought it was wrong for me to listen to recordings of the pieces I was studying because he was afraid I would not have my own ideas.

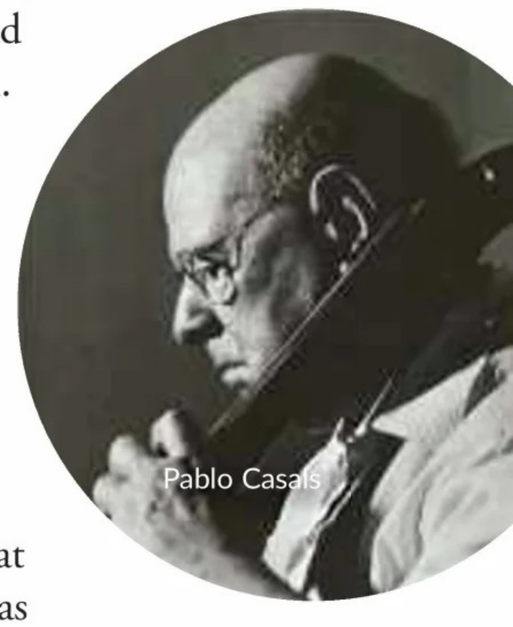
In 1956, it was time to think about college. I was very academic and I applied to top schools in America. I thought I wanted to become a mathematician. I chose MIT, but at that time it didn't have much to offer a young cellist, so instead I went to Harvard. During my first year there I became very confused about where my life would go – there were math freshmen there of such a high level that I realised my potential was greater in music. I took a year off to sort things out, returning in the meantime to Rejtő at USC. That was interrupted because of a family financial crisis, and I dropped out after only one semester. In spring 1958 I took any work I could get, including a US tour with a pops chamber orchestra – 53 concerts in 63 days. But I got hungry to return to Harvard, so I went back to finish my studies.

During the remaining three years of my degree, I made several trips to New York City for cello lessons with the great Leonard Rose, who had a very beautiful sound and an interest in technical ideas he had picked up from violinist Ivan Galamian at Meadowmount. I learnt a lot from him about how to use the bow, and, of course, from the example that his wonderful playing offered. But the infrequency of my visits limited what I could gain. He had a big career and was teaching a lot, and I considered it an honour that he would see me at all. But I also knew that I needed something else.

Leonard Rose

I applied for and was awarded a Fulbright grant to go to Cologne to study with the great Catalan cellist Gaspar Cassadó. When I first arrived, Cassadó had the impression that I had come as a student of Piatigorsky. That wasn't true, but Piatigorsky had endorsed the idea of my working with Cassadó, whom he had heard perform in Berlin in the 1920s – when he knew nothing about him but was impressed by his wonderful playing. Another great young cellist in Berlin in the 20s was Emanuel Feuermann. I think all three of these 'young lions' wanted to become known as the successor to Casals, who at that time was already about 50. But it didn't happen that way: Feuermann tragically died in 1942 at the age of 39; Cassadó died in 1966 at the age of 69; Casals himself lived on until 1973, dying aged 96; which left Piatigorsky the only survivor, but only until 1976, when he died aged 73.

In summer 1961, before my Fulbright studies began, I was invited to Casals' masterclasses in Zermatt, Switzerland. I spent two weeks there and was one of about ten cellists to play for him. The first piece I and my pianist Ellen Mack played was the opening movement of the Brahms Sonata in F major, marked Allegro vivace. After we played, Casals seemed upset. He said strongly that Brahms was a 'langsam' composer and I was playing too fast. He then asked me to play while he played. It felt like I had handcuffs on – he had such a strong will that it was impossible not to follow his lead. I was very unhappy about that, but he, of course, was the great master. In the next class, we played the Brahms middle movements and he was happier. At the last class we played the Beethoven Sonata in C major. When we finished (and in front of the entire group), he said to me, 'You must thank God for the gift he has given you, but you must not look for success, but be aware that you have a greater responsibility, and that the important thing is to serve music.' This was unexpected, but it made me happy.


Pablo Casals

I had no real chance to speak with him because the classes were such public events. Interestingly, among the listeners ▹

CASALS ASKED ME TO PLAY WHILE HE PLAYED. IT FELT LIKE I HAD HANDCUFFS ON – HE HAD SUCH A STRONG WILL THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO FOLLOW HIS LEAD

was Elisabeth, queen mother of Belgium, who had also complimented me earlier. When the sessions were over, we all had to travel down the mountain by train. While I was at the station I stood by the train and a window opened. Both Casals and the queen mother reached out to shake my hand, and she said to me, 'The best for the future!' I never saw her again.

Gaspar Cassadò

I later learnt that when Casals heard I was going to study with Cassadó he was upset. He wanted me to come to study with him, but I didn't know this at the time. Also, Cassadó and Casals had had a serious rift because Casals, who had gone into political exile from Spain, had heard that Cassadó was occasionally playing in Italy for fascists (this was probably not accurate) and was using Casals' name to promote his career (he had studied with Casals in Paris when he was very young and in my opinion was his greatest student).

When I first met Cassadó it was clear that he was jealous of Piatigorsky's career. He made a point of telling me that as a young man he was known as the Kreisler of the cello owing to his use of portamenti, but that as modern players we should no longer use them – if an oboe could play a beautiful melody without them, we should be able to do the same. I must say that I had never studied with a cellist who had as amazing a technical ability as he. He was a strong player, an emotional player, and could trill with any speed on any finger and play slurred staccatos at any speed in both directions. I remember being enthralled on hearing him play the Debussy Sonata and some movements of Bach in class. He was a demanding teacher who expected a lot of us. I think in that year, not having the pressure of college studies, I practised more than ever before. It was a moment of great growth for me. Cassadó had a lot of ideas about technique which he wanted us to develop. He was very big on the subject of clean left-hand articulation – for him it came from the first knuckles (nearest the palm).

Once when I drove him to the airport (he lived in Florence, Italy) – it was a simpler time at airports then – he invited me to a really wonderful lunch, and afterwards, as he was about to go through passport control, it looked like he was waving goodbye to me, but he wasn't. His left hand was in the air, and moving his fingers from the first knuckles, he pointed at them and said in a loud voice, 'Articulation!'

He was a man of great warmth but was equally petulant and upset when somebody wouldn't do as he asked – I would describe him as essentially a grown-up little boy.

When my Fulbright time was over I returned to Los Angeles, just after the Cuban Missile Crisis. I thought I would be drafted into the army, but Piatigorsky invited me to join his class at USC, where he had begun to teach while I was in Europe. That was the beginning of a life-changing period for me. It started in January 1963 and lasted until I left to teach in Baltimore at the Peabody Institute in 1970.

Piatigorsky's approach to teaching was quite different from anything I had experienced before. He never brought his cello

Laurence Lesser in 1978

I HAD NEVER STUDIED WITH A CELLIST WHO HAD AS AMAZING A TECHNICAL ABILITY AS CASSADÓ. IT WAS A MOMENT OF GREAT GROWTH FOR ME

to class and always sat behind a small desk, listening intently to the student's playing and sometimes following a score.

I would say his impact came from two main sources. First, he often grabbed the student's cello to demonstrate, and I would change where I was sitting so I could watch how he approached the instrument. Because he was such a natural player it seemed like a wonderfully powerful source of information just to learn from 'how he did it'. His tone was resonant, which was something I could relate to Rose's approach to using the bow like a heavy paintbrush. The contact of his bow was always on the sides of the string, pushing and pulling sideways rather than pressing down on it; that was accomplished by flexibility in the fingers of his right hand. He didn't actually say 'do it this way' – it was enough to see him do it and *hear* the wonderful result. I noticed that his left-hand ▹

LESSER PHOTO WILLIAM STRUHS

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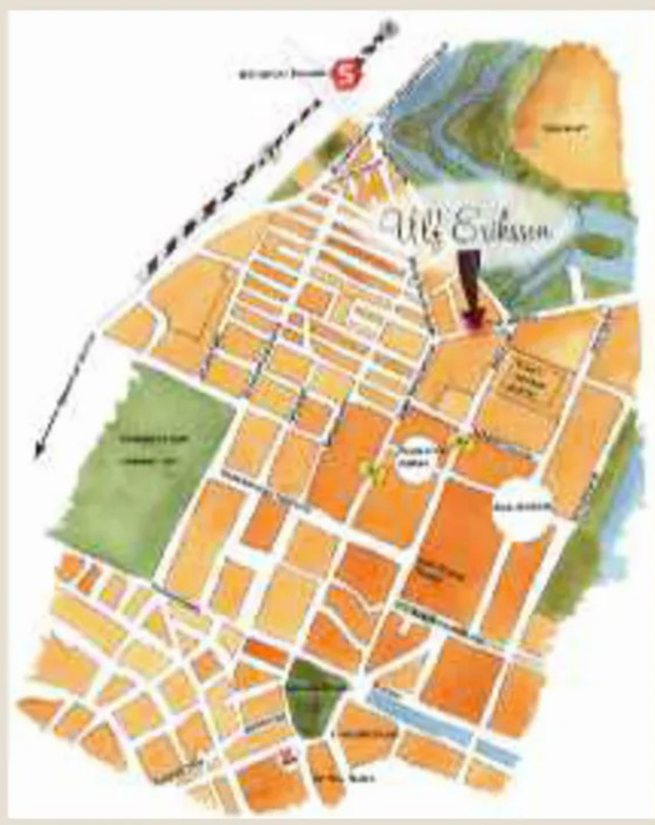

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CASALS AND PIATIGORSKY: A RARE ENCOUNTER

The only time I saw Casals and Piatigorsky together was at the 1967 Casals Festival in Puerto Rico. It was my first time there and for the two great artists it was a reunion after maybe 35 years. They were not close, either as artists or as people, but each had high regard for the other. During that season they played the Schumann Concerto with Casals conducting (bitly.ws/39Vu4). Because I was a young newcomer to the orchestra, sitting at the back, I didn't play in the reduced cello section. But I had a camera with high-speed black-and-white film and would roam around taking pictures. The one I caught of them sitting on a sofa together with Martita Casals, just before Piatigorsky went out to play the Haydn D major, was a lucky catch. When I later showed it to Piatigorsky, he said that there were three people sitting next to one another, but they couldn't be further apart in their thoughts. The following season I brought a copy of it to the festival and Casals was kind enough to sign it. Back home, I asked Piatigorsky to sign it as a gift to my parents. It is an iconic photo and possibly the only one ever signed by both artists.

(*Left–right*) Gregor Piatigorsky, Pablo Casals and Martita Casals in 1967

fingers generally pointed to the floor. This was different from Casals, whose fingers tended to be perpendicular to the fingerboard. He had many technical suggestions of a specific nature, but these were not central to his teaching.

The second element of Piatigorsky's teaching was psychological – he would get a result by just changing how we listened or what we thought as we were playing. I clearly remember a fellow student whose sound was very pushed inwards and therefore tight. Piatigorsky told him to try again, but to look out of the window to his right while doing so. The change in sonority was immediate and astonishing. It not only loosened the player's shoulders but compelled him to hear the sound he was making rather than looking down at his instrument.

Piatigorsky was also an amazing and charming storyteller – very often the point of his story was the key to a musical solution. That invited me to seek an approach myself which was intuitive, and I came up with one that is connected to listening as one sings a phrase before playing it. I still think that way.

Equally important with Piatigorsky was his interest and care for each of us as individuals. He taught generally in studio format, but sometimes he would invite us alone to come for a lesson at his house. Those sessions lasted never less than two hours.

Gregor Piatigorsky in 1972

CASALS FESTIVAL 1967 PHOTO LAURENCE LESSER

> HEIFETZ INVITED ME TO A SESSION DURING WHICH HE COACHED THE DOHNÁNYI SERENADE. WHAT ENSUED VIRTUALLY TAUGHT ME A NEW WAY TO LISTEN

Apart from the aforementioned main cello teachers, another huge impact on me during those magical years of the 1960s was frequent contact with Jascha Heifetz. I want to give two examples from the long list of what I learnt from him.

Heifetz taught in studio format and would never allow outsiders to listen. I was therefore surprised and excited when I learnt he had invited me to take part in a session during which he coached the Dohnányi op.10 Serenade for string trio. I also wasn't expecting what happened next. He wanted to play with us, so he took his student's violin and we played the variation movement. To say I was focused is no exaggeration. What ensued virtually taught me a new way to listen. At one moment I was holding a long note while he played a very fast run. As he started the bow stroke, with great intensity, I couldn't hear my own note. Then, as if it were hit by lightning, his sound couldn't be heard any longer. I knew he believed that one mark of a ▹

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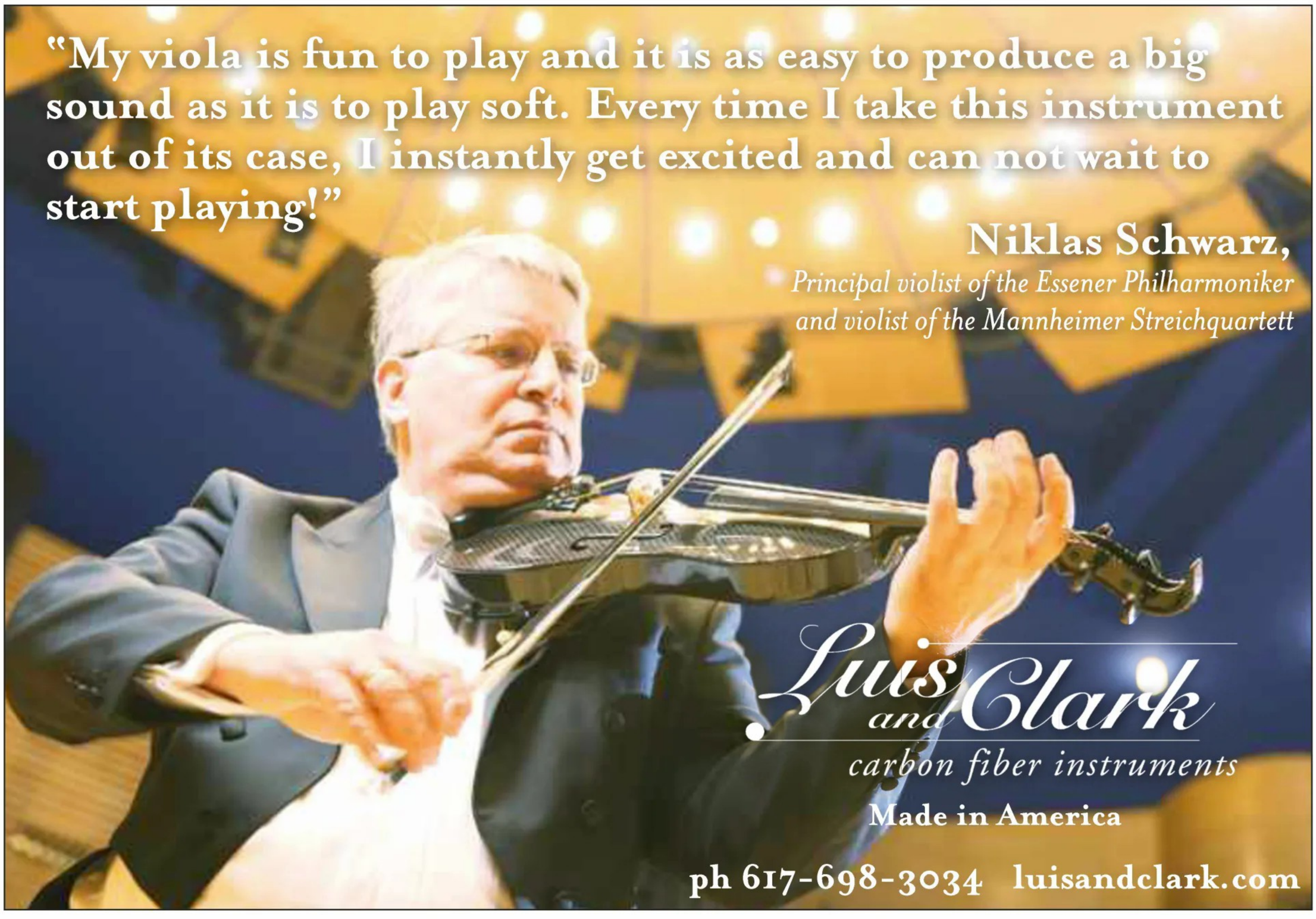


A legendary duo: Jascha Heifetz and Gregor Piatigorsky

virtuoso is how quickly they can make a diminuendo, but I had never thought much about it. I went home and listened to a lot of his recordings. What I learnt was that he was playing with an enormous range of dynamics and quicksilver inflection. I began to experiment and learnt that that was accomplished mostly by changing the speed of the bow. No teacher had ever talked to me to think about that.

The other experience came when I was recording Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* sextet as second cellist to my teacher Piatigorsky. In the slow movement, my part was often to play a simple pizzicato accompaniment while Heifetz was playing the main theme. I tried very hard to keep up with him. He stopped, with some dismay in his voice, and said 'Don't try to follow me; just play in time. I'll do the rest.' He wanted to weave in and out of a steady beat for greatest effect.

The other important source of my growth as a player and artist was to listen to great singers. There are two in particular who come to mind. One is the famous Russian bass Feodor Chaliapin, who befriended the young Piatigorsky and in one exchange with him suggested that he should listen to Piatigorsky to learn how to sing and that Piatigorsky should listen to him in order to learn how to make his cello speak. The other is the Italian Beniamino Gigli, who for me is the greatest of the bel canto tenors. He used a variety of intensity in a way similar to Heifetz but he also had an amazing sense of freedom in his singing, sometimes holding a high note longer than anyone felt could be possible. For the right music, this is a wonderful example of how to use time. I sometimes ask students to try to copy his singing to see what they can learn.

Although I barely studied with Casals, I consider that he and Piatigorsky had the greatest impact on my development. From

> FROM CASALS, AN ARTIST WHO COULD HOLD THE SHAPE OF AN ENTIRE WORK IN HIS MIND AS HE SCULPTED ITS DETAILS, I LEARNED TO THINK OF STRUCTURE

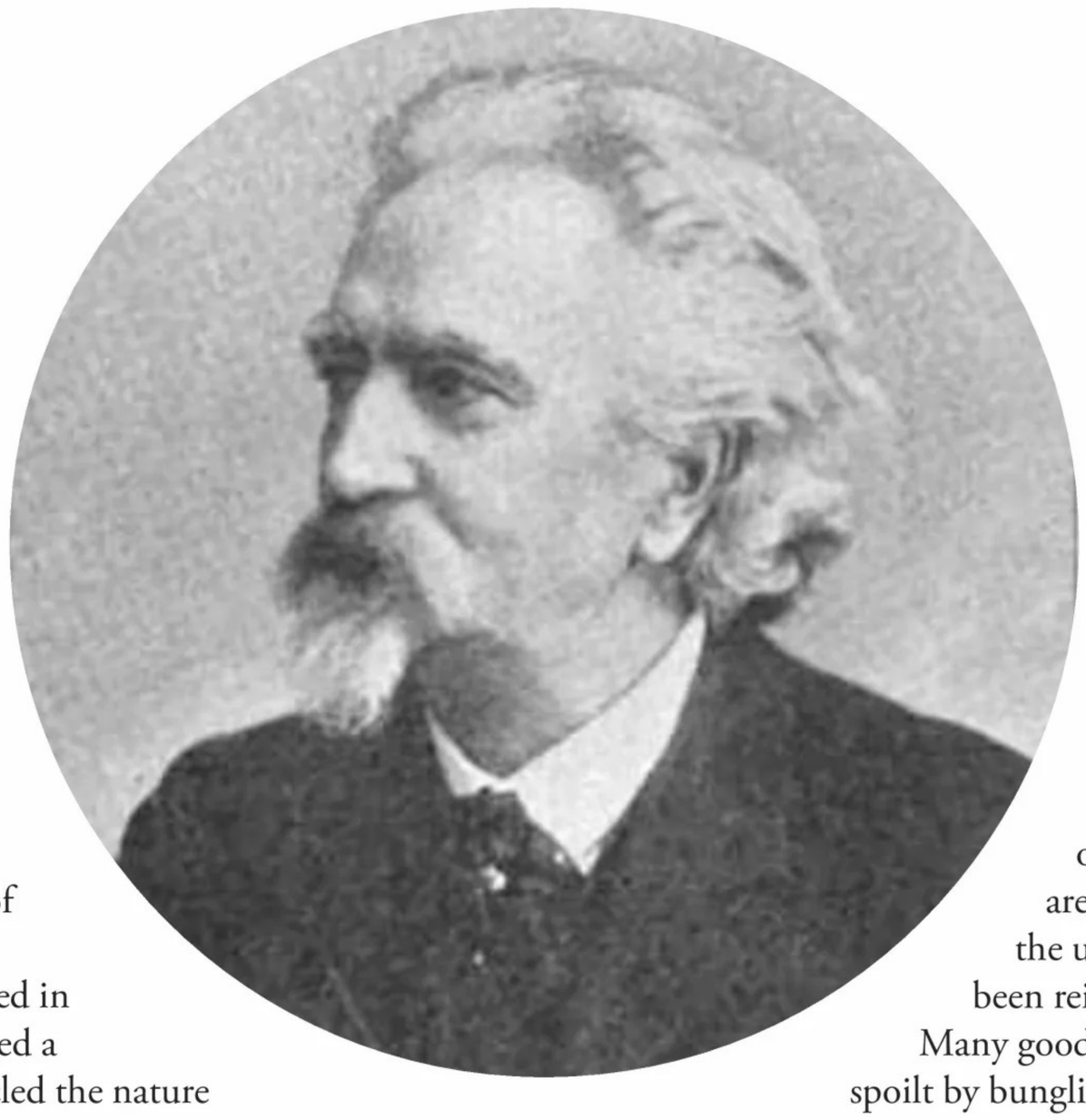
Casals, an artist who could hold the shape of an entire work in his mind as he sculpted its details, I learnt to think of structure. He was also so convincing in what he presented that it could not be denied by the listener. Piatigorsky was a phenomenal natural player with the uncanny ability to make each person listening feel he was playing to them individually. In anything melodic he was so intuitive, and while the shape of his music was just as honest and disciplined, its source came from his inner voice. In short, Piatigorsky was a storyteller, whereas Casals simply showed what he felt.

Gradually, I was able to find my own voice. I came to realise that a musician must know that their role is to play for the listener, to make the message of the composer come alive. You will succeed if you can do that. But Piatigorsky used to say, with a smile, that you should never play for the cellists in the audience; they always have a different idea. I have been extraordinarily lucky to sit at the feet of great masters, but the conclusion is that we are each an amalgam of influences from many sources. Our task is to meld them with our own nature, so we emerge with one voice – our own. ●

LESSER PHOTO LUCINDA HUTCHISON. HEIFETZ AND PIATIGORSKY PHOTOS LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC ARCHIVES

ROMANTIC VISIONARY

Although Otto Schünemann's violins were praised by everyone from Vuillaume to Sarasate, his name is barely recognised today. **Clifford Hall** tells the story of this idealistic luthier who strove to bring the glories of the Cremonese masters to 19th-century Germany



Otto Schünemann (1837–1914) had a problem. In the Prague ballet orchestra in which he was employed as a first violinist in the 1860s, he noticed that the violins were of such poor quality that the sound of the orchestra suffered greatly. He was still focused on the issue of poor-quality instruments two decades later when he was based in Hamburg, and in fact circulated a pamphlet in which he chronicled the nature of this issue.

'For more than a hundred years, violin making has made no progress,' wrote Schünemann. 'The best instruments were made by Amati, Stradivari, Guarneri and a number of famous makers, who passed on their mastery, talent and everything that goes with it, achieved through mutual sharing of their knowledge and skills. The boom in violin making in Italy was followed by a standstill, or rather a step backwards. Luthiers became content to imitate the instruments of the masters slavishly, and sell them under company names. It has remained so to this day. Narrow-minded masters who had achieved great skill took their experience and long-term observations with them [to the grave].'

With new violins of decent quality in short supply, Schünemann realised the scope of the problem also encompassed older violins, as they were not a reliable option either. 'It has been observed that violins from around 150 to 200 years old have a dull and hollow sound,' he wrote in the pamphlet. 'Even the most famous masters noticed this later dulling of the instruments, which manifests itself in the roaring, or faint colouring of individual tones, and there are many such violins… where the upper and lower bouts have been reinforced by adding wood. Many good instruments have been spoilt by bungling hands [and] there is no replacement, no offspring; indeed, no effort is even made to emulate them. It is really time for a change here [but] achieving this goal first requires the establishment of a violin making school where anyone who has the desire and talent can receive a complete education.'

Schünemann was perceptively responding to a system that had evolved from a small workshop with a master and apprentices to one that was more akin to Henry Ford's assembly line. 'It was no small wonder that skill levels sank with prices,' wrote David Schoenbaum in *The Violin: A Social History of the World's Most Versatile Instrument* (2012). 'In a process that effectively reduced making to four steps, Stainer's descendants built instrument bodies of back, top and ribs, and carved necks, varnished the assembled product, or set the instrument up. By the middle of the 19th century, virtually no one was left who knew how to build an entire instrument.'

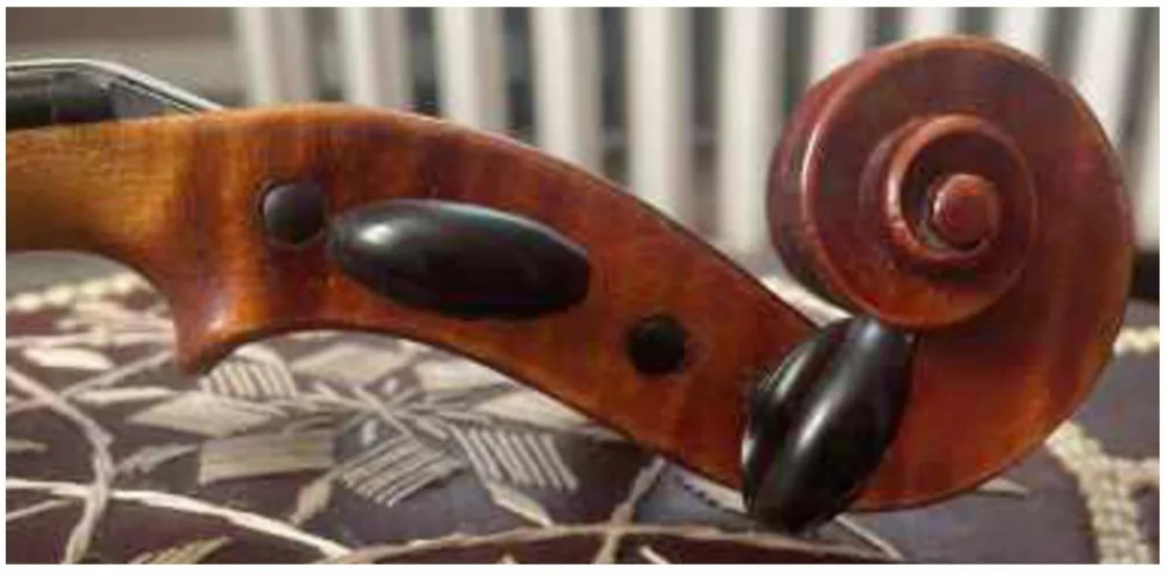
Even after Bavaria's King Maximilian II founded the *Unterrichts- und Musterwerkstatt* (a model teaching studio) in 1858, it would take a while for this Mittenwald institution to ramp up to Schünemann's more holistic concept, as it wasn't until 1888 that the curriculum finally expanded to include crafting complete musical instruments. In this environment, Schünemann's lofty idea of teaching lutherie in the old ways, but on a much larger scale, was quite a novel concept. Rather than just complain about this state of affairs, Schünemann decided to tackle the problem head on. But first he had to take up the craft himself.

The son of a watchmaker who liked to work with his hands, Schünemann started playing the violin as a child and studied with Carl Schulz in Rostock, Germany. As detailed in Henley's *Dictionary of Violin & Bow Makers*, Schünemann 'met a Dr Wirsing at Prague, and was inveigled by that enthusiast into the fascination of violin research. [He] went to Hamburg, spent every free minute from his professional engagements in perfecting the constructive art, and after nine years' assiduous perseverance, made himself known as a violin maker. [He] had several years of prosperity with his "tone-endowed" violins at Hamburg.'

It was during this period of intensive study that Schünemann must have realised he needed a gimmick to make his mark. In 1871 the London newspaper *The Musical World* published an account of his initial foray into the world of lutherie by earning the praise of one of the most prominent makers of the time:

> Prague—Herr Otto Schünemann, a member of the band at the Theatre, has just completed a violin that, with its case, may conveniently be carried in the breast pocket. M. Vuillaume of Paris, says of it: 'It is a masterpiece. I know no regular violin-maker, however clever, who could make one like it.' A tenor violin, also made by Herr Schünemann, has been pronounced by Herr Lautherbach the best ever produced, as far as regards beauty of tone. Herr Schünemann intends making a tour this summer through Europe, for the purpose of waiting upon all the leading virtuosos, trying their Instruments, and improving himself on the manufacture of the latter.

With this success, Schünemann would spend the next decade continuing his devotion to the art. It wasn't until 1884 that he wrote his pamphlet, which was offered for sale in various newspapers and magazines. Schünemann's essay also had a utilitarian tone as he noted 'at least the lessons are passed on from father to son; an apprentice from outside is also taken on, which almost never happens in cities, for fear that the apprentice might later be able to compete with the master. So if there really were someone with talent who would choose a profession, he would hardly find a suitable master for his training. It is easy to see that free development is not possible in violin making due to the above-mentioned disadvantages, which is also shown by the great lack of good instruments for our orchestras. Only a few large theatres are able to produce such enchanting effects from the string quartet through good instruments, almost unheard of elsewhere!' ▹



Left A rare photograph of Otto Schünemann towards the end of his life

This page Views of an 1882 Schünemann violin, made when the luthier was 45 years old

ALL PHOTOS CLIFFORD HALL

SCHÜNEMANN'S IDEA OF TEACHING LUTHERIE IN THE OLD WAYS, BUT ON A MUCH LARGER SCALE, WAS QUITE A NOVEL CONCEPT

This argument didn't take too long to find its audience, as three years later a development occurred that would radically change Schünemann's life.

Frederick Francis III (1851–97, *below*), the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, was one of the richest German sovereigns of the late 19th century. He was considered at the forefront of the feudal rulers in Germany and thought himself equal to the German Emperor. In 1891 he made world headlines as he publicly confronted Kaiser Wilhelm II, the newly crowned Emperor of Germany, as he disagreed with his aggressive nationalistic policies that would eventually lead the country into the First World War.

Alongside his political concerns, the Grand Duke 'showed an interest in art, history and architecture', according to Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller in his 1998 book *Man for man: biographical lexicon on the history of love between friends and male-male sexuality in authors of the German-speaking area*. As evidence for this, in the early 1880s the Grand Duke appointed Hermann Ritter his 'court chamber virtuoso'. Hergemöller wrote that a decade later he 'personally influenced the construction of the new Schwerin Cathedral tower and the conversion of the Helenen Paulowen mausoleum in Ludwigslust, which was to become his burial place'.

In this context, it isn't surprising that Schünemann found a sympathetic ear when he petitioned the Grand Duke for funds for the establishment of a violin making school in Schwerin. In 1887 it was reported in the *Gregoriusblatt für katholische Kirchenmusik:* 'Otto Schünemann of Mecklenburg said in a short essay published in Hamburg that the great successes in Italian art of earlier centuries were not exclusively due to the individual master and the individual workshop, but based on the school-like reproduction of the structure and the design. Mr Schünemann has credited the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg with his idea of founding a violin making school, and it should open on 1 October under the Grand Duke's protection.'

With the necessary funding secured, the school started in earnest. By March 1891 it was in full swing, as it was advertising for 'capable assistants' in the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*. With this firm foundation, the school started reaping the rewards of Schünemann's vision and the Grand Duke's wealth

Gregorius-Blatt.
Organ für katholische Kirchenmusik.
Nro. II. Aachen, August 1887. 12. Jahrgang.

Masthead of the *Gregoriusblatt für katholische Kirchenmusik*, which reported on the founding of Schünemann's violin making school in 1887

Otto Schünemann
Geigenbauer.
Von Hamburg nach **Warin i. M.** verzogen.
Violinen, Violas, Cellos, Bässe eigener Arbeit,
in großer Auswahl
Reparaturen in sorgfältigster Ausführung. [7028

Advertisement in the *Zeitschrift für Instrumentenbau* from 1910

NOTED SOLOISTS SUCH AS ADOLPH BRODSKY, KAREL HALÍŘ AND HUGO HEERMANN GAVE PERFORMANCES ON SCHÜNEMANN INSTRUMENTS

only two years later in 1893, when the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* reported on Spanish virtuoso Pablo Sarasate's visit: 'Sarasate made the acquaintance of the violin maker Otto Schünemann in Schwerin in June of this year, tested various instruments and found that, of all the new violins, these came closest to the Cremonese violins,' it wrote. 'He stated that Otto Schünemann is currently the best maker in the world [and] the listeners agreed with Sarasate's verdict. He wants to donate some of Schünemann's stringed instruments to the Conservatoire in Pamplona, to bring them to Spanish attention. It is to the credit of the Spanish virtuoso that he has drawn the musical world's attention to a German master who had done outstanding work in his field.'

Buoyed by this reporting, the school continued to attract positive press notices and more students. Noted soloists such as Adolph Brodsky, Karel Halíř and Hugo Heermann gave performances on Schünemann instruments. In 1896 the *Violin Times* published a reader's observation that 'my attention has been called by a Mecklenburg-Schwerin correspondent to the existence there of a very laudable institution, i.e. a school for violin making which is under the immediate patronage of HRH the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. The director is Mr Otto Schünemann who has already attained considerable repute in Germany as one of the most prominent violin makers of the day. Signor Sarasate and Herr August Wilhelmj have given him the highest testimonials for his work, which they pronounce to be of the very highest merit. The establishment over which Mr Schünemann rules receives articled pupils, who are bound to remain for four years. The institution has now been in existence eight years and is said to have turned out many successful pupils.'

So if Schünemann had the proficiency, the press and the patron, why is he unknown to the modern violin world? Considering he had the admiration of both Sarasate and Vuillaume, as well as access to the funds of one of Germany's richest grand dukes, it would seem this his star was in the

ascendant. But unbeknown to Schünemann and most of Germany, however, a dark storm was brewing.

On 13 April 1897, the *New York Times* reported a story (*below*) that shocked the world: the Grand Duke was alleged to have committed suicide in Cannes, France, by jumping off a parapet. Two days later, however, the *Times* printed an alternative account: 'He evidently staggered from giddiness, and fell over a low wall into the street, a considerable depth... and died peacefully an hour later.' To this day, the exact circumstances of his demise have never been definitively proven. More recent scholarship, however, has suggested a possible motive for suicide: according to Hergemöller, the Grand Duke had for years been tortured by self-loathing over his homosexuality, and also wanted to escape the pressure of blackmailers who were threatening to expose his secret.

Schünemann's school lost its funding immediately, as the Grand Duke's son did not share his love for the arts. In a profile for his 70th birthday by *Zeitschrift für Instrumentenbau*, Schünemann said: 'Deprived of its patron, the school of course could not survive without state support, and went under after a little more than ten years of existence.' Although this patron-based model had a long history in Germany, there was a huge disadvantage to having a patron instead of state support – the possibility that the next ruler would simply not be interested.

NEWS FROM THE OLD WORLD

The Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin Shown to Have Committed Suicide.

HE JUMPED FROM A PARAPET.

The Massacre of Armenians at Tokat Said to Have Been Greatly Exaggerated—Artist Beardsley Has Joined the Catholic Church.

CANNES, France, April 12.—A rumor is in circulation here to-day that the Grand Duke of Mechlenburg-Schwerin, whose death was anonunced as having occurred at 9 o'clock on Saturday night here, committed suicide. It was stated that his death was due to aneurism of the heart. Duke Johann Albrecht, the brother of the late Grand Duke, has assumed the regency of the Grand Duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin.

The report that the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin committed suicide is confirmed.

The Grand Duke, it appears, had been suffering terribly, and on Saturday evening he asked his doctor to leave the room in order that he might try to get a sleep. During the absence of the medical man and while he is supposed to have been delirious from high fever, the Grand Duke left his villa and threw himself from the parapet of a bridge near the house. He was found a few minutes later, still living, but so injured that he died in half an hour.

LABEL PHOTO COURTESY CLIFFORD HALL

'DEPRIVED OF ITS PATRON, THE SCHOOL WENT UNDER AFTER A LITTLE MORE THAN TEN YEARS OF EXISTENCE' – *OTTO SCHÜNEMANN*

The newspaper went on to report that 'based on his own work, Schünemann now wants to prove that it is possible to acquire the craftsmanship of former times, and there is still a beautiful and promising area of work for us Germans. With touching unselfishness, the 70-year-old master adheres to this idea, for which he is willing to sacrifice everything he has acquired. This is how he writes to us:

> As soon as possible, I will give demonstrations of my instruments in larger cities and earn the pennies necessary for me to continue my work with stability. What I have acquired should be donated to this enterprise; I already have a pretty little collection, and it is easy to create what is necessary.

'Those are the words of a truly unselfish, high-thinking man. We hope that Mr Schünemann's dreams will be fulfilled in the autumn of his life, and that his generous undertaking may receive the support it deserves, in the interests of German violin making.'

Despite once being vaunted to such great heights, Schünemann's name was lost in the mists of time, until a German researcher named Christoph von Fircks began to do some digging in 2014.

Label from an 1882 Schünemann violin

'I came across him via a note in the *Wariner Zeitung*,' von Fircks wrote in an email. 'As a volunteer local chronicler, I wanted to make known Schünemann and his life's achievements, as he was totally forgotten in the small town of Warin.' Schünemann's obituary states he built violins until the very end of his life, including in Warin.

Von Fircks's presentations about Schünemann were covered in the German newspaper *SVZ* in 2014 on the hundredth anniversary of the luthier's death. As regards his lasting legacy, along with his hidden impact on the German violin trade are the surviving instruments he made. These instruments are of an excellent standard and are still the best testament to the achievements of this humble, idealistic luthier. ●

THE POWER COUPLE

The concertos of Brahms and Busoni make a natural pairing on record but, as the violinist Francesca Dego explains to **Peter Quantrill**, the connection between them goes beyond the notes

Francesca Dego has been playing Brahms's Violin Concerto since she was a teenager. With a little over 20 years' experience, she feels now is a good time to take it into the studio, and in partnership with a like-minded conductor, Dalia Stasevska, to present 'Brahms without the beard'. She does so, however, informed by the wisdom and insights of a famous bearded maestro, Roger Norrington, who worked with Dego on his own final recordings before his retirement in 2021.

Dego recalls her first encounter with Norrington as 'a life-changing experience'. They played the Brahms together in Germany, and after their first meeting he sent her regular emails with new ideas: 'What I loved was how he never stopped researching.'

Her own research has shown Dego how much performances of music by Brahms have slowed down in recent decades. Joseph Joachim was the concerto's intended first soloist (in 1879) as well as Brahms's friend, on and off, for decades, and he left tempo indications in his edition that most modern performers and listeners would find shockingly precipitate, such as ♩ = 120 for the first movement. 'We're past the time,' remarks Dego, 'when teachers of the Russian school would tell us that metronome marks didn't matter because the metronomes were faulty. As Norrington said to me, Brahms wasn't playing Brahms "like Brahms" at the time. His inspiration would have been Beethoven or Mendelssohn.'

Perhaps the letter of the score is less important at this point than its implication, which is to think of the long and epic, quasi-symphonic first movement with a basic one-in-a-bar pulse, allowing all the more room for relaxation into its lyrical episodes. But, says Dego, 'You have to know the rules to break them. If you haven't read Joachim's foreword to his edition, if you haven't looked into all of this, then you're not really entitled to take the tempo the way you want or change the piece however you like. In the end, it's always about phrasing and shaping, and how to interpret what's written on the page as performers of the time would have done within the style that came naturally to them.'

'I KNEW I WANTED TO RECORD THE BUSONI AND HOW I WANTED IT TO SOUND – AND HOW I DIDN'T, WHICH IS SAFE' – *FRANCESCA DEGO*

She explains, though, that placing the music in its context shouldn't necessarily come from an academic mindset. 'The academic approach is like walking on eggshells, because you're afraid of doing the wrong thing.' As a competition juror rather than participant, she now sees this anxiety in younger performers. 'The more you can back your ideas with thought and musical reason, then the more convinced you'll be and thus more convincing, I think, in any repertoire.'

Looking at the score, we alight on bar 179 in the first movement, where the soloist plays a flowing stream of triplets against the winds softly elaborating the main theme. 'So many recordings take the solo line out of context, with vibrato on every note. If you look at how Brahms articulates the woodwind lines, with separate slurs for each bar of the theme, it helps you to understand how to phrase the triplets. You can be incredibly expressive by underlining where the phrasing is going rather than revelling in your own decoration.'

On DG and now Chandos, Dego has accumulated an impressive catalogue, but she views the new album as a landmark in her career – not solely as a setting down of 'her' Brahms, but as a work of advocacy for the much less familiar concerto by Busoni (the album is the first recording of either concerto by an all-female duo). The year 2024 marks a century since the composer's death in Berlin as a figure revered, misunderstood and embittered in roughly equal measure.

DAVIDE CERATI

Francesca Dego at the recording sessions with Dalia Stasevska and the BBC Symphony Orchestra

As a violinist of Italian heritage with a philosophical (one might almost say Germanic) turn of mind, Dego is perhaps uniquely well placed to give Busoni a helping hand. 'My mother's family is German-Jewish, and they were all killed by the Nazis. Even taking historically informed performance out of the picture, some of the best Mozart interpreters of our time have been Italian – Claudio Abbado, Salvatore Accardo, Giuliano Carmignola. And there's Mozart himself! Italy was one of the biggest influences on his writing. This connection has been lost to a degree but I do feel close to it. It's a strange relationship that Italians have with themselves and with the rest of the world. They need to demonstrate that they can play Beethoven – I don't know how to put it better than that!'

We return to Busoni, who himself referred to his Violin Sonata no.2 of 1898–1900 as an 'Opus 1', thus unhelpfully relegating reams of music written from childhood onwards (he was born in 1866) to the status of apprentice work. We can afford to be more generous, and it would take a stony heart, listening to Dego's playing, to resist the extroverted Paganini-meets-Brahms appeal of the Concerto, which he completed shortly before embarking on the Sonata no.2. Indeed, her approach to both this and the Brahms on the new album illuminates just how deeply Busoni was influenced by Brahms's example, working in some near-direct quotations, and thus also where he went his own way with a lightness of spirit that he struggled to emulate in his later music. 'There are some passages with pretty much the same notes, like the triplets in the coda of the finale, where if you play it by heart, you actually risk going into the wrong piece.'

Dego first picked up the Busoni Concerto in 2017. 'It's been in my head since then, but there's a lot of Italian repertoire that needs to be performed and recorded – and, may I add, in a non-archival way!' She has no truck with the rehearse–record process by which much lesser-known music is consigned to disc. 'A label may say, "We're missing that," and you end up learning it and recording it within a month, without even performing it – just so that it exists. I promised myself I would never do that with Italian repertoire. These are big pieces that need the kind of time and attention you'd give to the Sibelius Concerto. And the Busoni is *unbelievably* difficult.'

Dego spent time getting to grips with the Busoni in concert. 'In every performance I tried to speed up while going deeper and deeper into the piece. I knew I wanted to record it and how I wanted it to sound – and how I *didn't* want it to sound, which is safe.' Instead, she wanted to underline the 'fun and grotesque' elements of Busoni's writing that later embarrassed him. She points to the central tarantella–scherzo of the Second Violin Sonata, 'which is obviously a homage to the finale of Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata, but also completely Italian. Maybe he was trying to deny this part of his heritage, but it's part of his soul, and it comes out regardless.'

Dego concludes, 'The Busoni risks sounding like an etude if all you do is nail the notes, which is already a challenge. It isn't violinistic. The finale is reminiscent of the Mendelssohn with a lot of leggiero figuration, but you have to spend hundreds more hours on it, because the writing doesn't really work. Paganini knew what he was asking for, whereas Busoni doesn't know exactly how to achieve what he wants. Once those issues are resolved, audiences can really warm to the piece, as both a homage to Brahms and Beethoven, and a virtuoso concerto in its own right.'

WORKS **Brahms** Violin Concerto
Busoni Violin Concerto
ARTISTS **Francesca Dego (vn)**
BBC Symphony Orchestra/Dalia Stasevska
RECORDING VENUE **Phoenix Concert Hall, Fairfield Halls, Croydon, UK**
RECORDING DATES **4 and 5 July 2023**
CATALOGUE NUMBER **Chandos CHSA 5333**
RELEASE DATE **1 March 2024**

ALEXANDER JAMES

Portrait of the violinist Jacques Pierre Joseph Rode (c.1801–04), attributed to Jacques-Antoine-Marie Lemoine (1751–1824)

THE RODE LESS TRAVELLED

He is best remembered for his didactic 24 Caprices, but there's much more to Pierre Rode. For the French virtuoso's 250th anniversary, **Charlotte Gardner** reveals a colourful life story and hears from the German violinist Friedemann Eichhorn, who has revived and recorded all of Rode's 13 violin concertos

Beethoven, or gnarly technical studies: which is it for you? Chances are it's one or both of those that represents the sum total of any association you may have with Pierre Rode. In all fairness, there are worse ways to go down in history than as the violinist who premiered Beethoven's Tenth Violin Sonata, or as the composer of 24 Caprices (one for each key), which today remain an essential plank of every aspiring professional violinist's technical training, sitting between those of Kreutzer and Paganini in terms of difficulty. Yet with 2024 marking the 250th anniversary of Rode's birth, there couldn't be a better time to take a closer look at this largely forgotten French virtuoso – not least because anyone who does will find not just 13 violin concertos ripe for rehabilitation, but also a biographical story which, at points, is as colourful as that of his older contemporary and compatriot the virtuoso violinist Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, whose own life recently inspired the biopic *Chevalier* (2022).

COURTESY OF MAURIZIO NOBILE FINE ART, PARIS

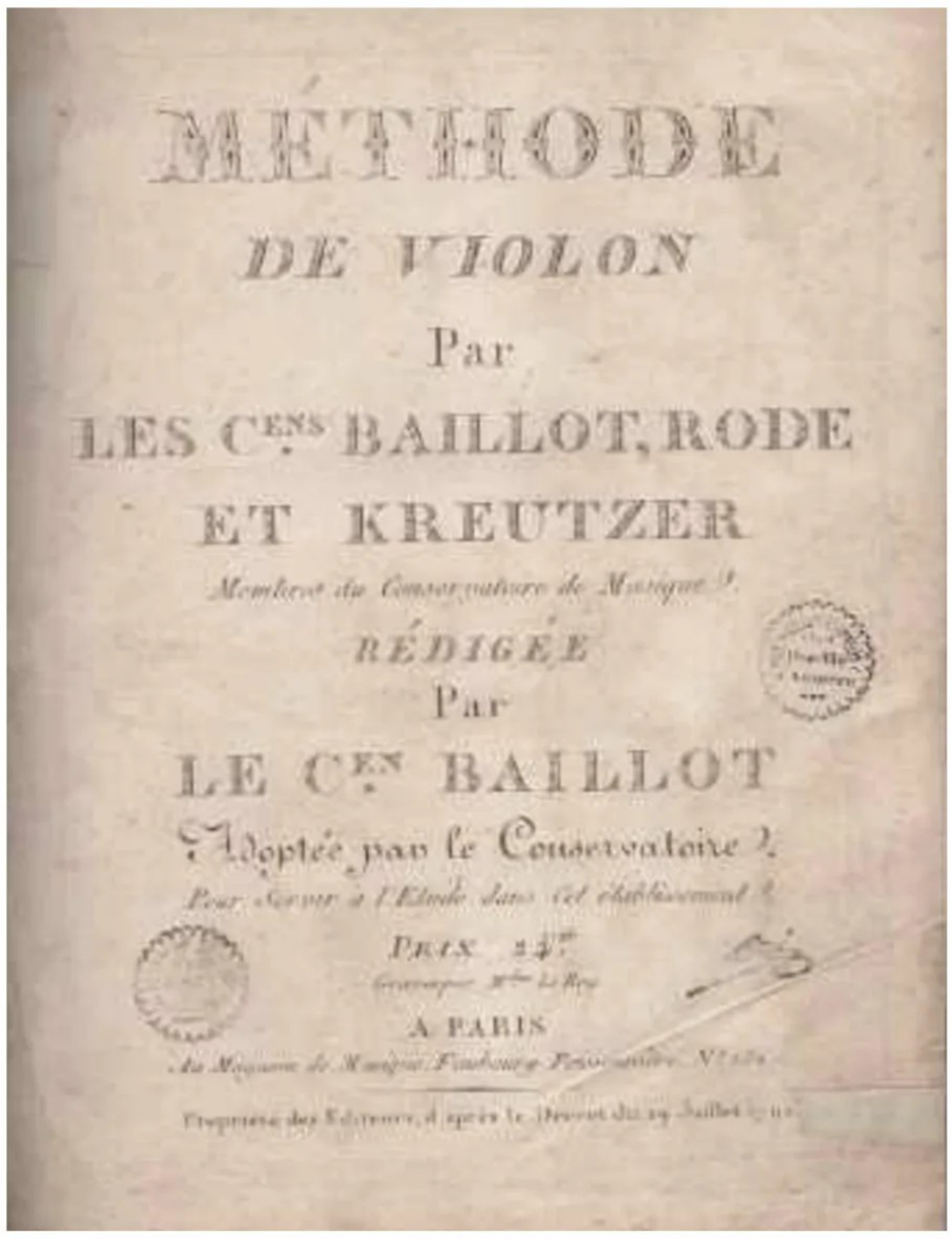
(*Left-right*) Pierre Baillot, Rodolphe Kreutzer and Pierre Rode met as students in Paris and formed a lifelong friendship

The son of a Bordeaux perfumer, Rode was born on 16 February 1774 – and his life story hots up pretty quickly. Aged 12, he was making his first concerto appearances in Bordeaux. At 13, his teacher André-Joseph Fauvel took him to Paris to play before Giovanni Battista Viotti. Rode stayed on to become Viotti's star pupil, scoring a solo debut triumph – and thus career lift-off – in 1790 with the latter's Violin Concerto no.13. These teenage years also saw Rode form lasting friendships with fellow young violinists Pierre Baillot, another Viotti pupil, and Rodolphe Kreutzer, future dedicatee of Beethoven's Violin Sonata no.9. In the year of the Paris Conservatoire's foundation, 1795, all three were appointed to its violin faculty (with Rode only 21 years old), and there appears to have been a notable lack of competition between them. Baillot wrote admiringly of the 'charm and purity' of Rode's concerto playing in this period. His playing also earned him the nickname the 'Correggio of the violin', apparently because it had a sensuous suavity similar to that of the works of the great Renaissance painter.

Yet far from the conservatoire appointment leading to a stable life of teaching and performing in Paris, the unfolding French Revolution saw Rode enlist (as a clarinettist, of all things) for the War in the Vendée, although he soon thought better of it, escaping first to the relative peace of Rouen before becoming a travelling international virtuoso and eventually ending up in London, where Viotti had immigrated. However, Rode's French style seems not to have chimed with English taste, and he appears not to have considered it financially worthwhile to adapt, sniping later in a letter to Baillot, 'You have to be a dancer or castrated to succeed there.' Instead, in 1797 he returned to France where, talent undimmed, he was back performing with Kreutzer to a delighted audience at the Théâtre Feydeau, Paris. In 1799 came a prolonged stay in Spain, where he met and befriended Boccherini and where, now also composing, he dedicated his Sixth Violin Concerto to the Spanish queen.

Rode was back in Paris in 1800, co-authoring the famous *Méthode de Violon* (published in 1803) with Baillot and Kreutzer while also holding the position of 'solo violin' of the 'First Consul's *musique particulière*', the small and select group with which Napoleon had replaced the King's Music. ▹

RODE'S FRENCH STYLE SEEMS NOT TO HAVE CHIMED WITH ENGLISH TASTE. HE SNIPED IN A LETTER, 'YOU HAVE TO BE A DANCER OR CASTRATED TO SUCCEED THERE'


MÉTHODE
DE VIOLON
Par
LES Cens BAILLOT, RODE
ET KREUTZER
Membres du Conservatoire de Musique.
RÉDIGÉE
Par
LE Cen BAILLOT
Adoptée par le Conservatoire
Pour servir à l'Etude dans cet établissement.
PRIX
A PARIS

Rode co-authored the seminal *Méthode de Violon* (1803) with Pierre Baillot and Rodolphe Kreutzer

Portrait of Giuseppina Grassini by Louise Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun

Yet this latter appointment led Rode (now in his mid-twenties) to play with fire, for multiple sources cite him as having been the lover of Napoleon's mistress, the Italian opera singer Giuseppina Grassini, to whom he dedicated his Eighth Violin Concerto. But Napoleon's discovery of the affair, followed by Grassini fleeing Paris, took the wind out of Rode's sails. In November 1801, clearly het up, he wrote to Baillot, 'I have just arrived to take Madame Grassini 20 leagues from here […] I have been too preoccupied these days and I still have too much grief to have the courage to go to the conservatoire tomorrow. Until then, I hope to calm my head a little, because if this has to last, I swear to you that I will be very unhappy.'

Rode remained in Paris for the (delayed) laying of the first stone of the conservatoire in 1802. That year, he also joined five other composers, Kreutzer among them, to establish a publishing house that would run until 1811. However, announcing his departure for St Petersburg, he performed a farewell concert at the year's end. 'He was sublime in the first piece of his concerto,' reported the *Courrier des spectacles*, reflecting upon his imminent absence. 'Its rondeau and its varied tunes have attracted the votes of connoisseurs and amateurs.'

Rode seems to have then worked a concert tour into his 1803 journey to St Petersburg, and it's during a stop in Hanover that he appears to have suffered the first attack of a debilitating, undiagnosed arm complaint. But the Russian welcome was a warm one, the tsar appointing him master of his chapel and ensuring he lived in great comfort. Eventually, though, homesickness and worsening health prompted a return to Paris in 1808 – where his homecoming concert immediately made it clear that he couldn't take up where he had left off, as his playing had noticeably deteriorated. As luck would have it, a neat before-and-after analysis has survived, courtesy of violinist and composer Louis Spohr. Having heard him perform on his way out to Russia, in 1803 in Brunswick, Germany, Spohr wrote, 'The more I heard him, the more I was captivated by his playing.' By contrast, Spohr's 1813 account of his post-Russia hearing describes Rode's playing now to be 'cold, and full of mannerism'. Sensing his audiences' disappointment, Rode largely retired from the stage, playing only privately, often with ever-faithful Baillot and Kreutzer.

So it seems that the famous 1812 Vienna visit which saw him premiere Beethoven's Tenth Violin Sonata op.96 was made when he was known to be far from his peak (despite being only in his late thirties) and performing only rarely. It's well documented that Rode's playing style obliged Beethoven to write with a more fragile elegance than was his natural wont – 'We like quick, full-toned passages in our Finales, which do not suit R., and this rather cramps me,' wrote the composer. Beethoven perhaps also had wider concerns, given the fact that he mentioned considering sending the score to Rode in advance, for him to practise.

The remainder of Rode's life is, at first glance, a decrescendo. In 1814, he married in Berlin, where he became a doting father, struck up a warm relationship with the Mendelssohn family and devoted himself to teaching. In 1820, homesick again, he returned with his family to Paris, but soon decamped to Bordeaux. In 1828 came a disastrous Paris concert. 'The intonation, formerly so pure and so fine, had become uncertain,' wrote Belgian musicologist and critic François-Joseph Fétis. 'The bow was timid, as were the fingers; the élan, the passion, the security of experience, which replaces the audacity of youth, all had vanished.' This episode appears to have finished off Rode emotionally. It seems the following year he suffered a stroke, further exacerbating the problems with his arm, and on 25 November 1830 he died. Writing shortly afterwards, a heartbroken Baillot remembered a violinist 'whose play, full of charm, purity, and elegance, reflected so well the amiable qualities of his mind and his heart'.

And yet, what Rode lost in the 1810s in terms of his concert career, the world gained tenfold in his pedagogical legacy, as he doubled down on what he had started as a founder of the French school, becoming a sought-after teacher, and in 1819 publishing his seminal 24 Caprices. Also in 1819, his most important pupil, Joseph Böhm (1795–1876), was appointed the first violin professor of the recently established Vienna Conservatoire; and from Böhm, Rode's golden lineage continued, his own pupils including Jakob Dont and Joseph Joachim, with the latter – who sits in so many pedagogical family trees – still able late in life to play from memory Rode pieces he'd studied in Vienna. 'Rode is a very important relative of all of us professional violinists. You can find him in the chain of nearly everybody,' ▷

Joseph Böhm

MULTIPLE SOURCES CITE RODE AS THE LOVER OF NAPOLEON'S MISTRESS, THE ITALIAN OPERA SINGER GIUSEPPINA GRASSINI

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RESIDENT VIOLIN MAKER ECHO ARTS MUNICH

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says violinist Friedemann Eichhorn, Kronberg Academy director and Rode specialist, who himself studied with Valery Gradow, who studied with Adolf Leschinski, who studied with Carl Flesch, who studied with Jakob Grün – who studied with Böhm.

Eichhorn's contribution to Rode scholarship is immense. Most recently, he contributed the additional markings for Henle's definitive edition of the 24 Caprices, which he describes as Rode's most important work, and one which a violinist cannot live without. 'You play Kreutzer, then you play Rode,' he says, 'and if somebody can play these caprices, then they really know how to play the violin.' What is more, the caprices even give us further clues as to how Rode sounded himself, such is the detail of the indications he provided in them. For instance, the way the same finger is often used from one note to the next suggests he played a lot of glissandos. Also, the bowings suggest both an incredible legato and an extraodinarily slow bow. '"Elegant" is exactly the word,' says Eichhorn.

Eichhorn's even more significant Rode project, though, has been rediscovering his 13 violin concertos, and partnering with Naxos to record them all – a twelve-year artistic and scholarly labour of love that came about when he was looking for recordings of the caprices with which to aid his teaching, and on finding Oscar Shumsky's, his thoughts turned naturally to the concertos. 'I knew very little about them, beyond having played the one that has remained in the canon, no.7,' he says. 'I thought that if there was a no.7, there must be at least six others, and was then astonished to find that not only were there 13 altogether, but that there wasn't a single recording of any of them, even the seventh!'

Friedemann Eichhorn

With the help of his music-collector friend, Jonathan Frohnen, Eichhorn tracked down the music, at which point came a further surprise. He'd assumed the concertos would be similar in style to the caprices, but they turned out to be completely different. Whereas the caprices are clearly pedagogical, systematically working their way through the cosmos of violin technique, the concertos reveal a composer who simply wants

Manuscript for the solo part of Rode's Violin Concerto no.3

to write beautiful music, in a language which sounds on the one hand familiar, as though it could be early Beethoven, or Mendelssohn, but on the other hand entirely individual.

'Rode is a singer on the violin,' enthuses Eichhorn. 'The second movements especially are in an operatic, arioso style. Looking at them, I can imagine how he must have been a very sensitive man who would have taken the later criticism of his playing very seriously.' There's also plenty of long-lined song in the first movements, which generally consist of three big violin sections with orchestral sections in between, sometimes playing out as a sort of ritornello form, and other times more in the direction of sonata form. Throughout, Rode doesn't come across as a show-off virtuoso. 'He's not trying to compete with colleagues such as Kreutzer and Baillot in the way that Ernst and Paganini competed with each other,' says Eichhorn, citing the comparative lack of double-stops as an example.

Friedemann Eichhorn recording with conductor Nicolás Pasquet and the Jena Philharmonic

EICHHORN PORTRAIT PHOTO GUIDO WERNER

However, there is more virtuoso fire in the rondo-form final movements (all the concertos have three movements) – vivid creations that often feature ideas from other cultures, such as polonaises or Russian songs.

Equally vivid is Rode's orchestration, both in its oboe, trumpet and timpani colour, and in the dialogue. 'It's much more than a solo concerto,' Eichhorn says. 'It was at our first orchestral rehearsal – probably the first time in a hundred years that these pieces had been heard with orchestra – that we first really appreciated the extent of the interaction between the instrumentalists of the orchestra and the solo violinist. Especially in the second movements, where suddenly there will be a bassoon solo, or flute. The violinist often acts as a sort of *primus inter pares*, almost like in chamber music.'

Another interesting element is that, in contrast to Rode's meticulous indications in the caprices, the concertos contain significantly fewer performance markings, from bowings through to crescendos and diminuendos. He also presents many cadenza opportunities, especially in the first movements, but doesn't supply much substance for them, beyond some fermatas, lead-ins and lead-outs. This was presumably because he was largely writing for himself, even though others – Paganini, Wieniawski, Bériot – played them too. 'This was actually the most fun and interesting part of the project,' Eichhorn says. 'With no performance tradition, it was beautiful to be able to be quite creative with the text, even as far as tempos, guided basically by the idea of playing them in an attractive way. For example, the final movements have places where there's a double bar and a key change, so we got in the groove there, playing it slightly più mosso.'

As for which of Rode's concertos are the most musically outstanding, while no.7 remains the most famous, thanks to Wieniawski (who also added a cadenza), Eichhorn particularly enjoys no.3: 'It's a very, very beautiful concerto, and I'd say the most dramatic, with its G minor first movement. Then the last movement is a polonaise, over which you can really project.' Also noteworthy is the posthumously published no.13, dedicated to Baillot. 'It's special because it's always switching between F sharp minor and A major, to the extent that you can't tell which of the two keys it's actually in, like a double tonality.'

Asked why he thinks these works aren't played by other violinists, Eichhorn suggests the reason is twofold. First, Rode's name hasn't survived in the wider public consciousness in the way that Paganini's and Wieniawski's have. Second, there has been a lack of available sheet music, because while printed copies have existed, published by the likes of Edition Peters, Simrock and Johann André, often it has just been parts, with no conductor's score, and these are frequently so difficult to read as to be completely impractical. By way of demonstration, Eichhorn holds an original publication up to his webcam (we're on Zoom), and indeed it looks so messy that it's little better than a manuscript. So a major project element was preparing new, clean parts and conductor's scores.

Now that we have the context of the concertos, do the caprices deserve a reassessment for concert potential? 'Many of them do work well in concert,' Eichhorn affirms. 'At the International Louis Spohr Competition for Young Violinists in Weimar, at the University of Music Franz Liszt – where I teach – you can choose to play a Rode caprice, and it works very well. Rode often writes his caprices in two parts: a singing introduction in a slow tempo, followed by a faster section, and it's beautiful, even while not as spectacular as Paganini.'

Still, it's the concertos that he wants to see benefit the most from this important anniversary year, believing as strongly as he does that they are musically worthy of being brought back into the repertoire; and with his Naxos cycle having now provided both recorded inspiration and physical parts, the stage is certainly set. ●

> 'RODE IS A SINGER ON THE VIOLIN, IN THE SECOND MOVEMENTS ESPECIALLY'
> –*FRIEDEMANN EICHHORN*

RODE'S STRADS

When Pierre Rode died in 1830, he left behind two Stradivari violins. The 1715 'Rode, Duke of Cambridge' Stradivari (*below left*) was American virtuoso Oscar Shumsky's instrument from 1975 (on which he made the world premiere recording of Rode's 24 Caprices in 1987). He told *The Strad* in April 1985: 'It was a case of "love at first sound"... A quick glance told me that the violin was not only a Stradivarius but one of the finest examples I had seen.'

The 1722 'Pierre Rode' Stradivari (*below right*) is one of only around a dozen decorated instruments made by the master luthier. It is held in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK.

1722 'PIERRE RODE' STRAD PHOTO COURTESY OF ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, OXFORD

Arnold E. Schnitzer adjusting the soundpost on a double bass

Not a GIANT VIOLIN

The size and shape of the double bass mean its set-up differs greatly from the other bowed stringed instruments. Bass maker **Arnold E. Schnitzer** presents a comprehensive guide, designed for both luthiers and practically minded bassists

Compared to a violin, the double bass is enormous, heavy, ergonomically challenging and prone to mishap. Its size and mass make it difficult to carry, store and transport. The amount of tension pulling on the instrument (commonly around 100kg or 220 pounds) makes its construction parameters critical. Build it too lightly and it will self-destruct; too heavily and it will sound and respond poorly. The set-up is noticeably different in many ways from that of the violin, viola and cello, and is crucial to a good, healthy playing experience. The double bass is played in more varied types of music than any of the other stringed instruments, requiring various set-up details. There are no real standards for string length, body size or shape.

My intention in this article is to provide some important set-up and playability details to aspiring bass luthiers and handy double bass owners. With that in mind, here are a number of considerations for getting and keeping a double bass in good playable condition.

CLIMATE CONSIDERATIONS

Being so wide (wood expands and contracts mainly across its width), a double bass reacts more severely to rapid changes in relative humidity (RH) than other instruments. Most problematic is the change from humid to dry conditions, when cracks and seam openings tend to occur. Top plate-to-rib seams should therefore be closed with very weak hide glue, so that seams will tend to open before cracks form in the fragile softwood. RH should be monitored regularly; of course 50 per cent would be ideal. But that is rarely attainable in the real world (of central heating and rapid travel between different climate zones). Basses that reside in temperate areas should in most cases be humidified in the dry months. Gradually weaning the RH into the 30–40 per cent range will avoid most problems. Room humidifiers are most effective, but internal humidification is sometimes the only available solution. This is most effective when the instrument is kept in its case. Care must be taken to avoid damage caused by dripping from internal humidification devices.

Flat-backed basses are more prone to dryness-related problems, because the back braces are mounted at acute angles to the wood of the back plate. Violins, violas and cellos do not encounter this issue as they do not have braced flat backs. Flat-backed basses are also more likely to need seasonal soundpost changes and/or adjustments.

Warning: Over-humidifying a bass in the dry season can cause open seams and cracks when the instrument leaves its humid environs for very dry venues.

SET-UP PARAMETERS

Unlike the other bowed stringed instruments, a majority of bass music is played in the lower positions of the neck. It is important for the fingerboard camber to be even throughout, and not sloped noticeably up towards the nut. The camber on the E-string side should be 1.5–2.5mm, and 1–1.5mm on the G-string side. In both cases, the nadir occurs around the exit of the fingerboard from the neck wood.

Under the centre strings, the camber should get progressively lower from the E to the G side. Camber is best measured under string tension. Because bass necks are under considerable tension, there is a tendency for them to bend a bit. Many bass luthiers (myself included) utilise carbon-fibre stiffeners in bass necks to counter this. The stiffener seems to have a secondary benefit of improving the instrument's response, as little energy is wasted in making the neck wobble and vibrate, instead promoting more energy transfer to the corpus.

Keep in mind that aggressive players generally need more camber than finesse players. This is especially true of jazz and bluegrass bassists, who tend to play mainly pizzicato. Luthiers setting up a bass would be wise to observe the playing style of the bassist before tackling their set-up. Pizzicato players who fire the string towards the fingerboard cause considerably more rattling than those who fire across the string. Arco players who tend to play near the fingerboard will cause more rattling than those who play close to the bridge. Regardless of the fingerboard layout, any bass can be made to rattle if played super-aggressively. Dressing a bass fingerboard must be considered a compromise between easy playability and attaining the cleanest possible sound. Perfection is unattainable.

FINGERBOARD ARCH SPECS

Based on a standard fingerboard length of 860–870mm:

For general all-around playability
End 68mm radius; nut 53mm radius.
Easy jazz set-up End 72mm radius; nut 60mm radius
Soloist set-up End 64mm radius; nut 50mm radius.

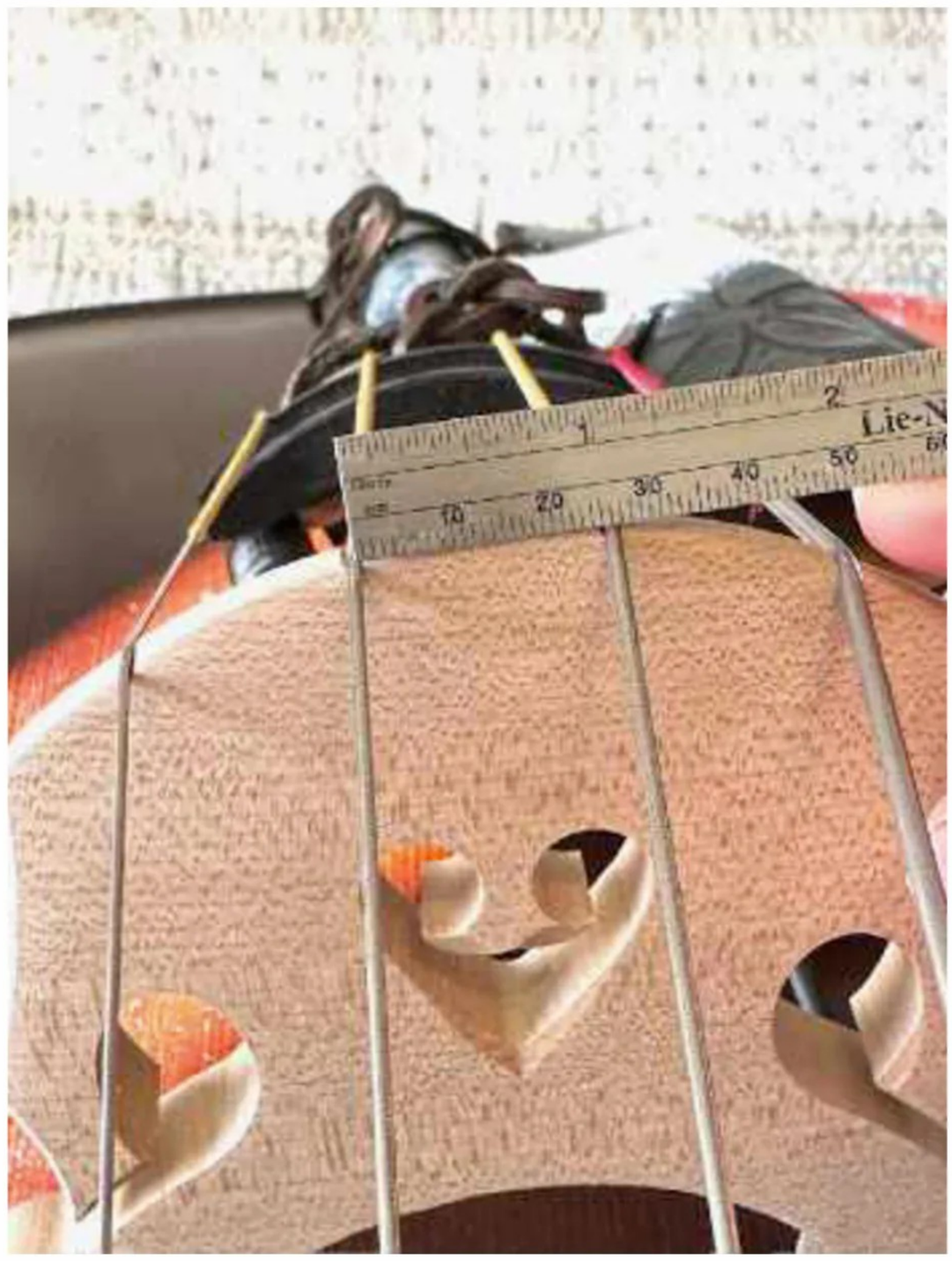
A slight inverted 'V' shape towards the upper (thumb) positions can be helpful to players who often venture into that zone. That shape can help prevent the string from sliding sideways when pressed down in the thumb positions. ▹

FLAT-BACKED BASSES ARE MORE LIKELY TO NEED SEASONAL SOUNDPOST CHANGES AND/OR ADJUSTMENTS

MAIN PHOTO KENN LUCAS. OTHER PHOTOS ARNOLD E. SCHNITZER

All these specs are for a rounded fingerboard, not one with a Romberg shelf (see **figure 1**). Those will generally have less arch under the middle strings, and will therefore require extra height above the fingerboard on those strings. Keep in mind that the wider the strings are set at the bridge, the less arch is needed to facilitate clean string-crossings. Also bear in mind that not all fingerboards are thick enough to be dressed for a tight-radius arch while still maintaining adequate edge thickness of over 9mm.

At the nut, the average distance between string centres should be 10mm for average spacing, 11mm for wide spacing and 9mm for narrow spacing. All strings should be set approximately 0.4mm above the fingerboard surface (about the thickness of an average business card). This will probably seem low to violin luthiers, but keep two things in mind: firstly, a lot of bass playing occurs near the nut; and secondly, the thick bass strings resist bending somewhat, and form a slight arch shape leaving the nut, so buzzing rarely happens there. The nut grooves should be formed accurately, just slightly wider than the string's diameter. Groove depths should be about two thirds of the string's diameter. Widening the grooves slightly as they enter the pegbox eases tuning, as does lubricating with soft pencil graphite. At the bridge, the average distance between



Checking the distance between string centres at the bridge. Dividers are also useful for this task.

string centres should be 26–27mm. Wide spacing would be 28–29mm while narrow would be 24–25mm.

STRING HEIGHTS AT THE END OF THE FINGERBOARD

Measured to the underside of the string:

Average G: 5–6mm; E: 8–9mm
Low G: 3.5–4.5mm; E: 6–7mm
High G: 7–9mm; E: 10–12mm

These measurements are for steel and hybrid strings. Gut strings will generally need more height and more fingerboard camber (especially for players of the 'slap' style, who often like to be able to get their entire plucking finger between the string and fingerboard). Ideally, each string from G to E will sit 1mm higher above the fingerboard, i.e. G: 6mm, D: 7mm, A: 8mm, E: 9mm. As you can deduce, string heights and bridge arch are dependent on the shape of the fingerboard. There is no universal template for bass bridge shape/arch. Again, Romberg-shelved fingerboards will require higher middle strings to be bowable.

Bridge adjuster wheels are a valuable tool with which to assess the best bridge height for player comfort and sound quality. There is still some controversy concerning the effect of adjuster wheels on sound quality; truthfully, I and most of my colleagues cannot hear a significant difference between solid bridges and those with adjuster wheels (when they are properly installed). Different types are available, made of materials such as aluminium, Delrin and wood. The tonal differences between them are subtle. ▹

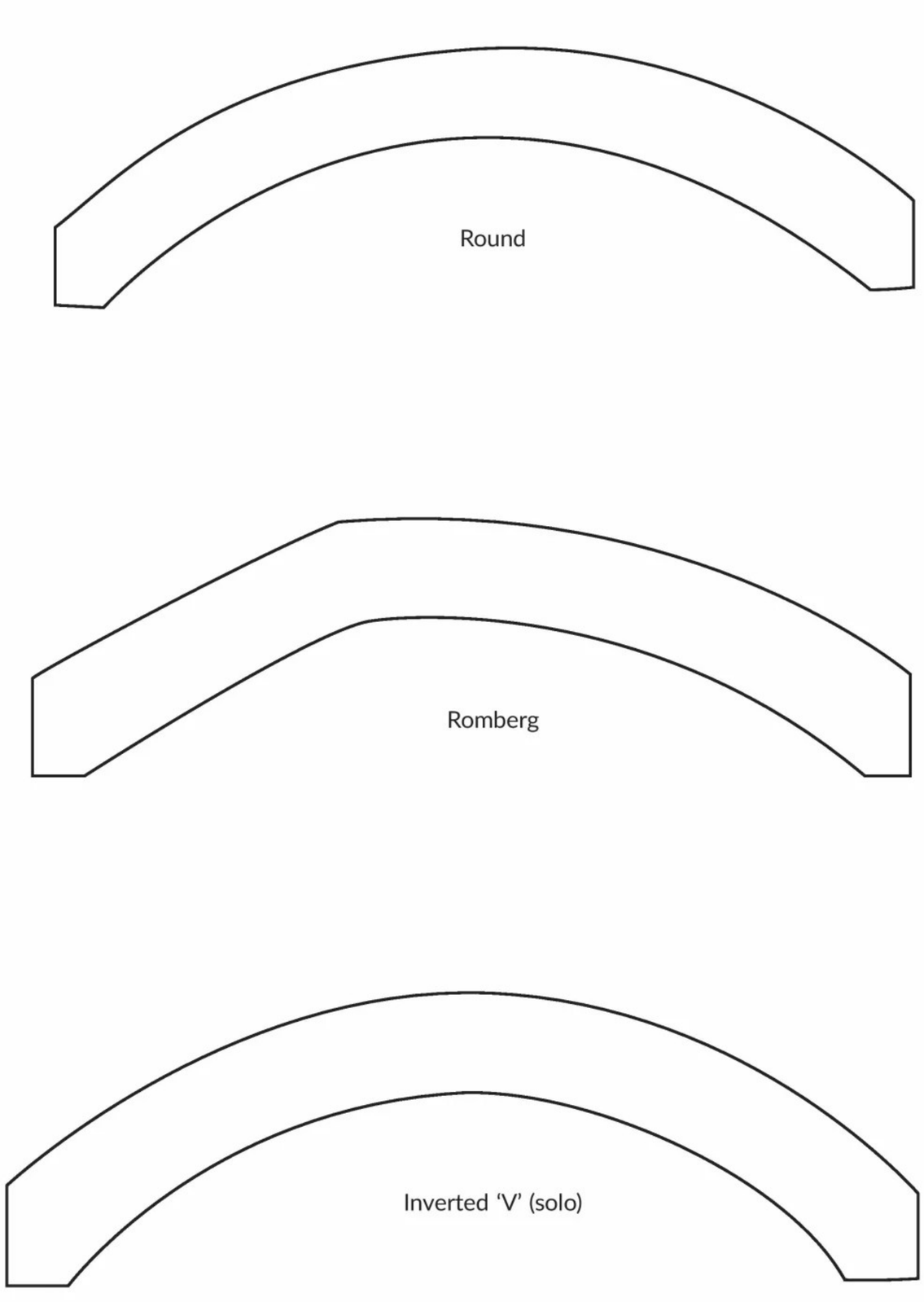


FIGURE 1 Double bass fingerboard styles (at the end towards the bridge)

Checking string height using a home-made gauge
crafted from an old credit card

The kit I use for establishing proper grooves in bass bridges and nuts:
Top Divider
Left–right Fine tapered round file; Fine triangle file; Coarse triangle rasp:
Edge cutting round file 0.125/0.105”; Edge cutting round file 0.090/0.075”;
Edge cutting round file 0.050/0.060"
The edge cutting files are available from stewmac.com
Not shown is a #2 pencil for lubricating the grooves.

Strings placed evenly on an adjustable bridge.
Note the china marker position marks on the top plate.

Here is a collection of commonly used bridge adjusters:
Top row left–right Standard aluminium 1/4” x 20; 5/16” x 18; brass 1/4” x 20;
extended aluminium 1/4” x 20
Bottom row left–right McIntosh all Maple; Shen Walnut/Aluminium;
Kolstein Lignum; New Harmony composite

BRIDGE ADJUSTER WHEELS ARE VALUABLE FOR ASSESSING THE BEST BRIDGE HEIGHT

ALL PHOTOS AND DIAGRAMS ARNOLD E. SCHNITZER

TAILPIECE AND TAILWIRE

Because basses are prone to excessive wolf tones and undesirable resonances, heavier tailpieces often clean up the sound for arco players. However, the damping provided by a heavy tailpiece may be at odds with the desired tone and response sought by pizzicato players. Most bass luthiers tune the afterlengths to two octaves and a perfect 4th above the open string, as the bass is (usually) tuned in perfect 4ths. The ideal position for the bottom end of the tailpiece is about 1cm from the saddle. This brings up a significant problem; few tailpiece lengths are commercially available at this time, despite the immense variation in bass sizes and shapes. This is why I make a tailpiece for each of my hand-made basses.

The ideal break-over angle at the bridge (measured over the A string) is 31 to 34 degrees. Of course, this angle is determined by the layout of the neck to body, as well as the bridge position relative to the length of the lower to upper bouts, and the bridge height. Some luthiers, wanting to reduce the break-over angle (to lessen the perceived tension or downward pressure on the top plate) will create a raised saddle to do so. The raised saddle may in some cases also reduce the prevalence of wolf tones.

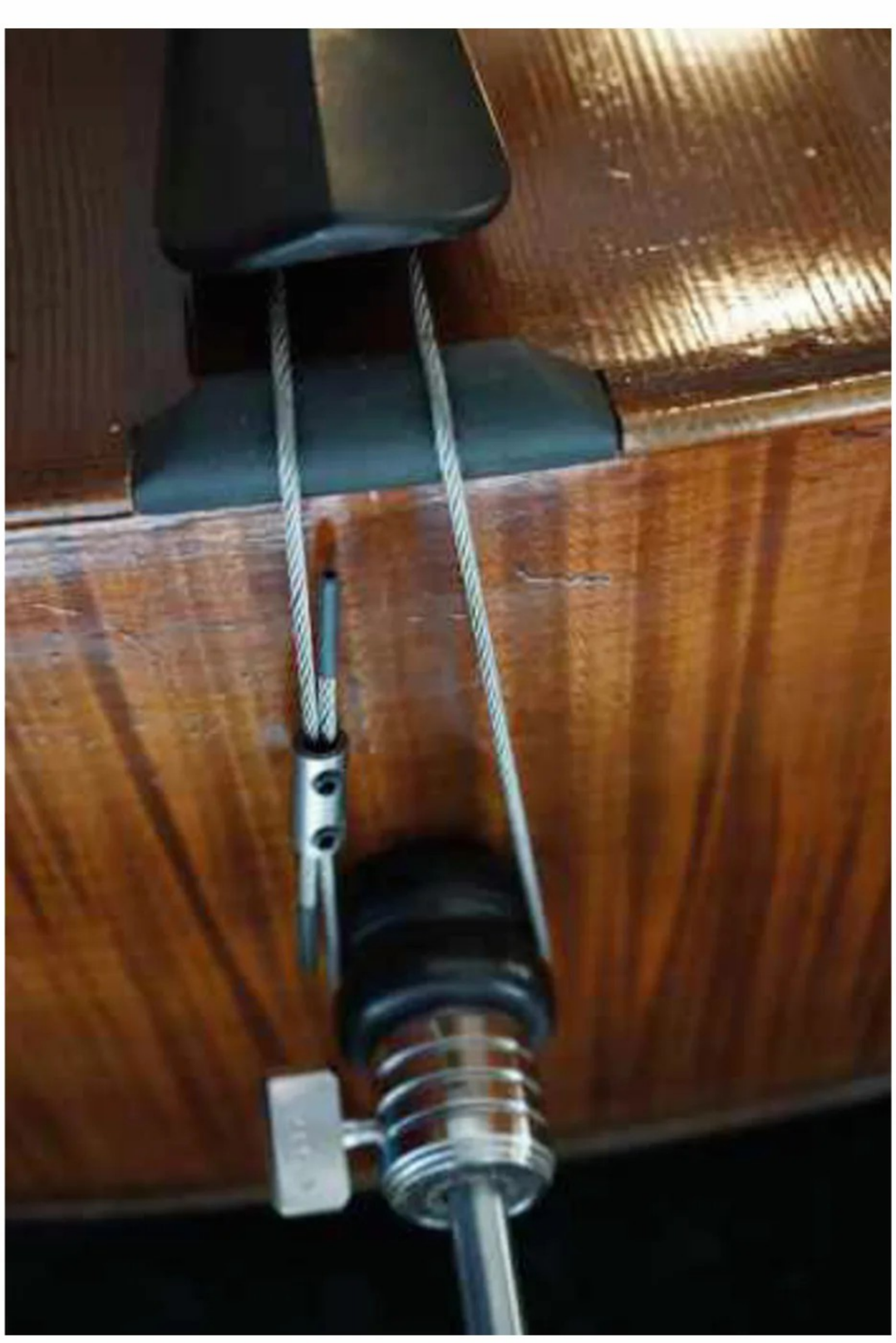
Tailwires are available in braided steel, synthetic and solid. My personal preference is 7x7 strand 3/32" (2.5mm) braided stainless steel, with a barrel-shaped adjustable connector. Solid wire is rarely seen these days. The synthetic material has improved in recent years and many luthiers and players prefer it, believing it helps produce a warmer sound.

SOUNDPOST

Properly fitting and adjusting a double bass soundpost is a demanding task, as the post is large (17–19mm), and its fit, position and tension are all critical. The soundpost is usually placed proportionally a little further from the bridge than in the smaller instruments. **Figure 2** shows a diagram of the 'neutral' bass soundpost position, where it will function well in most circumstances.

SOME LUTHIERS, WANTING TO REDUCE THE BREAK-OVER ANGLE, WILL CREATE A RAISED SADDLE TO DO SO

Measuring the break-over angle. To be consistent, I always measure on the A (third) string



Double bass tailwire made from a 7x7 strand 3/32" (2.5mm) length of braided stainless steel

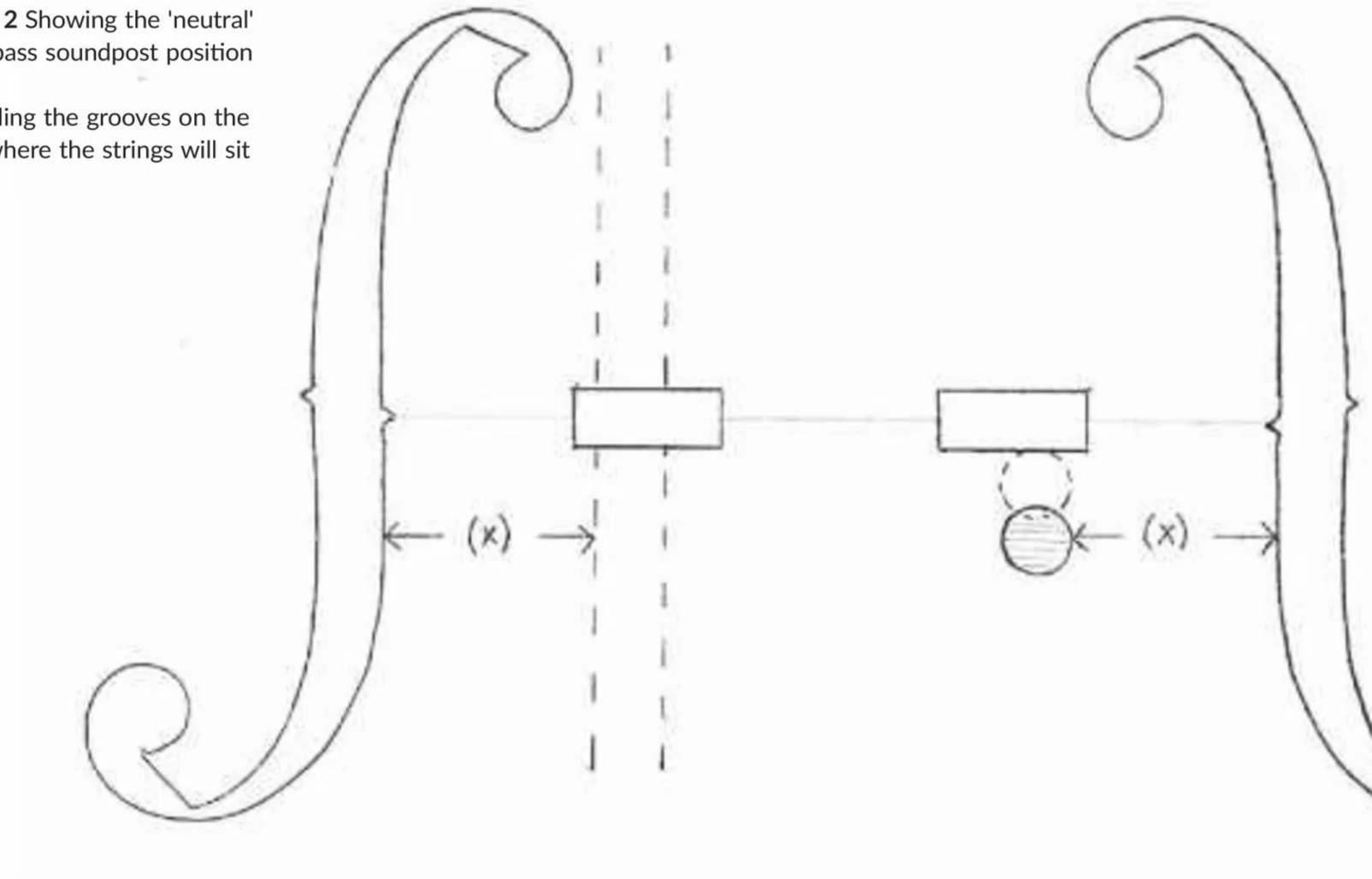


FIGURE 2 Showing the 'neutral' double bass soundpost position

Below Filing the grooves on the bridge where the strings will sit

Moving the soundpost towards the treble f-hole (east) usually accentuates the bass register response, because it allows the bass-bar and the bass side of the bridge to oscillate more. Moving it towards the bass f-hole (west) usually accentuates the treble register response because it inhibits that oscillation. Moving it towards the bridge foot (north) usually tightens the response. Moving it away from the bridge foot (south) usually loosens the response. It can also increase the perceived volume, and wolf tones. In general, bowing is more controlled with the soundpost closer to the bridge foot; pizzicato playing is more responsive with the post further away. I'm talking about a few millimetres here, not large movements. Some instruments respond differently to soundpost moves than outlined here; every bass will benefit from some experimentation.

Warning If the soundpost is positioned too far from the bridge foot (south), top plate sinkage in the bridge area is likely. The proper tension of a bass soundpost allows it just to stand up in full contact, with the bass on its back, without the post falling over. That said, if you quickly remove the strings and bridge, many soundposts will topple, as the top plate is springy.

BASS ERGONOMICS

When setting or resetting a bass neck, it is important to consider several variables: the shape of the shoulders; overstand; proper centring; desired bridge height (which is related to C-bout dimensions and top plate arching); and the depth of the instrument corpus at the neck joint. For modern playing, most basses of 3/4 to 4/4 size do well with an overstand of 34–40mm. Narrow-shouldered instruments may require less. Basses that are broad and deep can be a quandary; if the overstand is too high, the player will need to bend forwards uncomfortably to finger and bow. Some large basses (such as those made by Hawkes & Son) may do better with a slightly lower overstand (25–30mm) and more angle to the neck. This may seem counter-intuitive, as it is thought that a higher overstand always makes transitioning into the thumb positions easier. High overstand on a deep bass can be especially problematic for players who are stout.

Neck projection in the 155–165mm range works for most 3/4 to 4/4 basses, and will result in bridge height about 10mm higher than the projection measurement. Since basses are not standardised, mocking up and making a full-size diagram of the bass can be an important step in the process to assure bow clearance and a comfortable playing experience.

Long considered unworthy of the finest set-up and restoration work, the double bass is currently experiencing a renaissance worldwide. Consequently, the best double bass luthiers have advanced their craft to a level worthy of the finest stringed instruments, both in construction and in repair and restoration. ●

BRIDGE PHOTO KENN LUCAS. ALL OTHER PHOTOS AND DIAGRAM ARNOLD E. SCHNITZER

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LUIGI ROVATTI

WRITTEN BY LIONNEL GENOVART

Luigi Rovatti was one of the first Italian luthiers to establish himself in Argentina. Born in 1863, he began his training as a luthier in Genoa, studying under the masters Giuseppe and Enrico Rocca.

In 1884, aged 21, Rovatti received a bronze medal at the Esposizione Generale Italiana in Turin. In 1886 he crossed the Atlantic with his wife Margherita Rocca (Enrico's cousin) on the ship *Orione* and settled in Buenos Aires.

Rovatti received gold medals for his violins and cellos at the 1898 National Exhibition of Buenos Aires and at the 1920 Industrial Exhibition of the Centennial. These awards contributed to establishing his name in Argentina as an outstanding maker of stringed instruments. He was a prolific luthier, creating a large body of work including violins, violas, cellos, guitars and mandolins. One of his best-known instruments is the cello he crafted in 1910 for the Argentine cellist Ennio Bolognini. This instrument is now part of the permanent collection at the Smithsonian National Museum in Washington DC, and is notable for bearing 51 autographs of famous musicians who were friends of Bolognini. Rovatti died in 1931 leaving behind a son, Tomás, who followed in his father's footsteps in the art of lutherie.

MAKER
LUIGI ROVATTI

NATIONALITY
ITALIAN

BORN
1863

DIED
1931

INSTRUMENT
VIOLA

DATE
1899

MATERIALS

The top of the 1899 viola shown here is made from spruce with a fine grain, especially towards the edges, with a small knot in the bass-side lower bout. The back is of tangential maple, very typical of this period in Rovatti's career. There are two small ebony pins in the neck root; Rovatti normally used either one or two to secure the neck temporarily.

NECK

The neck is carved from a more flamed maple. A particular point of interest is the fitting of the neck. The height at the scroll end is quite low, a common feature in Italian instruments from this period. This is not very advisable, as it causes an angle at the bridge height that does not help the viola's sound. The pegholes were originally very large; he may have made them like this generally, on account of the tools he had at his disposal.

FORM AND CONSTRUCTION

This viola was crafted on an external mould, as is abundantly clear from the termination of the corners. It has an unconventional size, similar to the violas made by Rovatti's near-contemporary Camillo Mandelli (1873–1956), who made many smaller violas for tango musicians who would play the violin or viola depending on the orchestra's needs. This facilitated the switch between instruments.

STAMP

In many cases, rather than adding a label, Rovatti only used a stamp ('Luigi Rovatti Fabricante') applied here on the viola's top-block. Also, he nearly always added the street where he lived. He also did this on his labels; in this case he wrote 'L'Anarchia, B. Aires . 1899'.

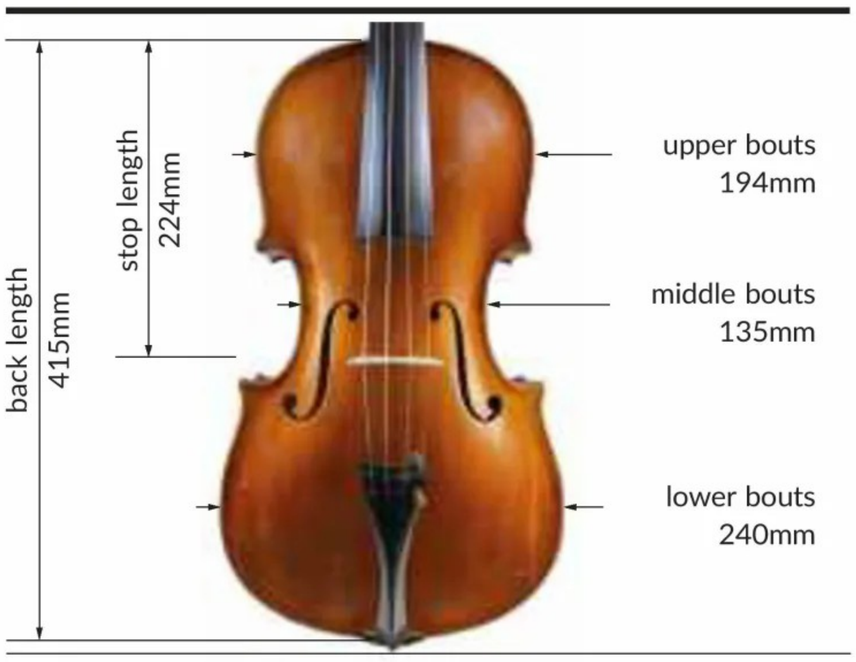
VARNISH

The oil-based varnish is of a yellow–brown colour, set over a golden ground.

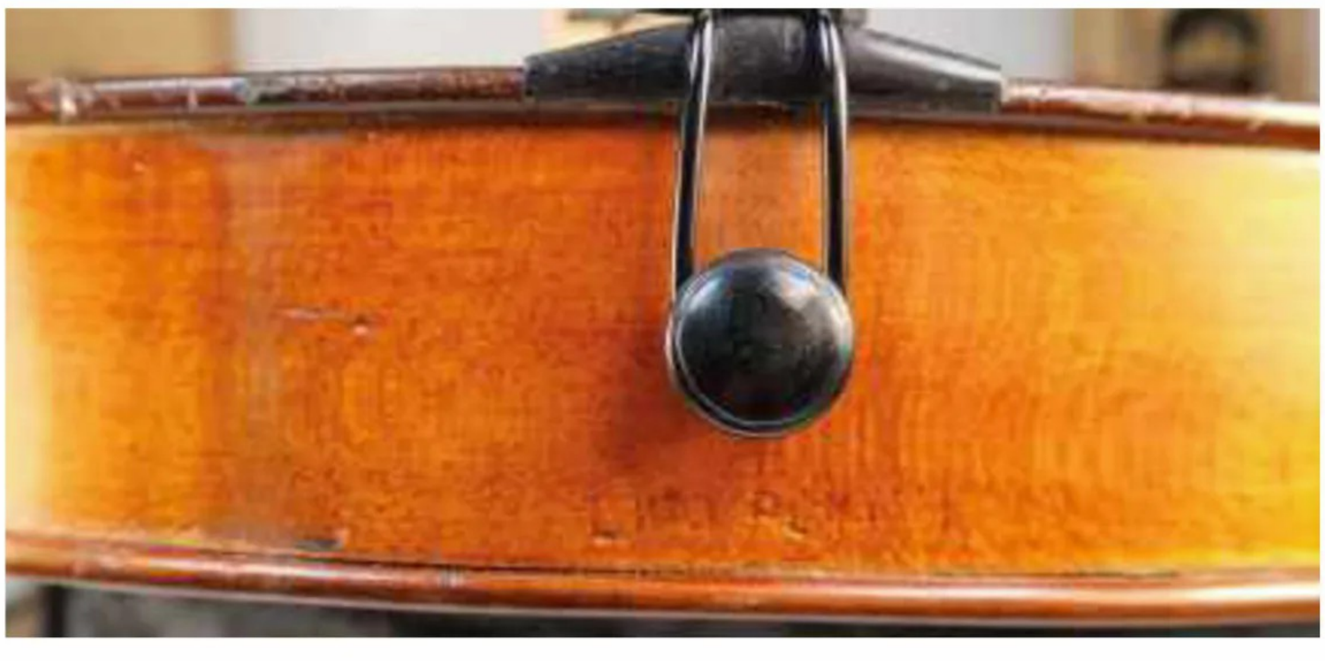
INTERIOR

On the linings, one can observe the marks of the presses Rovatti frequently used during the gluing process. ▹

ALL PHOTOS LIONNEL GENOVART



All measurements taken with a tape measure



Repairing a cello button

A restoration method for creating a new button on the back plate

BY PETKO PETKOV

Luthier based in Kazanlak, Bulgaria

The cello is one of the most delicate instruments in the violin family. Acquiring a cello is a journey that involves extensive research, numerous questions and instrument testing. Given their substantial size and the significant investment required, cellos are often cherished for many years. This extended use, however, leads to various specific issues that demand regular maintenance and care.

One of the most common problems encountered during prolonged cello use is the breakage of the button. This is a highly delicate part of the instrument, and as a restorer I have frequently encountered this issue. Several factors can contribute to heel breakage, such as a poorly built neck, excessive hollowing of the purfling channel, and impact on the neck. I am currently working on an old cello with a broken button, whose owner has asked me to try to give a new life to his instrument.

The top of the back plate shows signs of wear

The excessively deep purfling channel

1 A poorly constructed neck joint at the top-block caused all the tension to be absorbed by the heel. Over time, this has led to the breakage of the heel. The dark patch at the top of the back plate shows a significant amount of glue that remained between the neck and the button on the back plate.

2 The purfling channel has been excessively hollowed, leading to the weakening of the annual growth rings on the instrument top. This has finally resulted in the heel breaking. On one hand, the purfling channel is too deep, while on the other, the purfling itself has not fit snugly into the channel.

ALL PHOTOS PETKO PETKOV

The outline and replacement maple

3 I start by drawing the outline on the back where I will graft a piece of maple to replace the broken heel. The new piece consists of a single piece of maple, to ensure greater strength.

4a

Marking out the outline

4b

Carving the outline

4 Next I carve the outline on the back plate, using a knife and a straight chisel. In this process I aim to carve out a wedge shape; the thicker part is next to the purfling and the thinner part at the end of the top-block. I then fill it in by gluing in a new piece of wood. When viewed from above, the infill has the shape of a trapezoid. In most cases, when the heel is broken, the purfling is also damaged and needs to be restored.

5a

Planing the replacement maple

5b

5 To fit the piece of maple to the back, I prefer to use a plane. With it, I achieve perfectly straight and smooth walls, which I find impossible with a file. I thin the piece of wood sideways to attain the necessary dimensions, and to make it adhere tightly to the back. ▹

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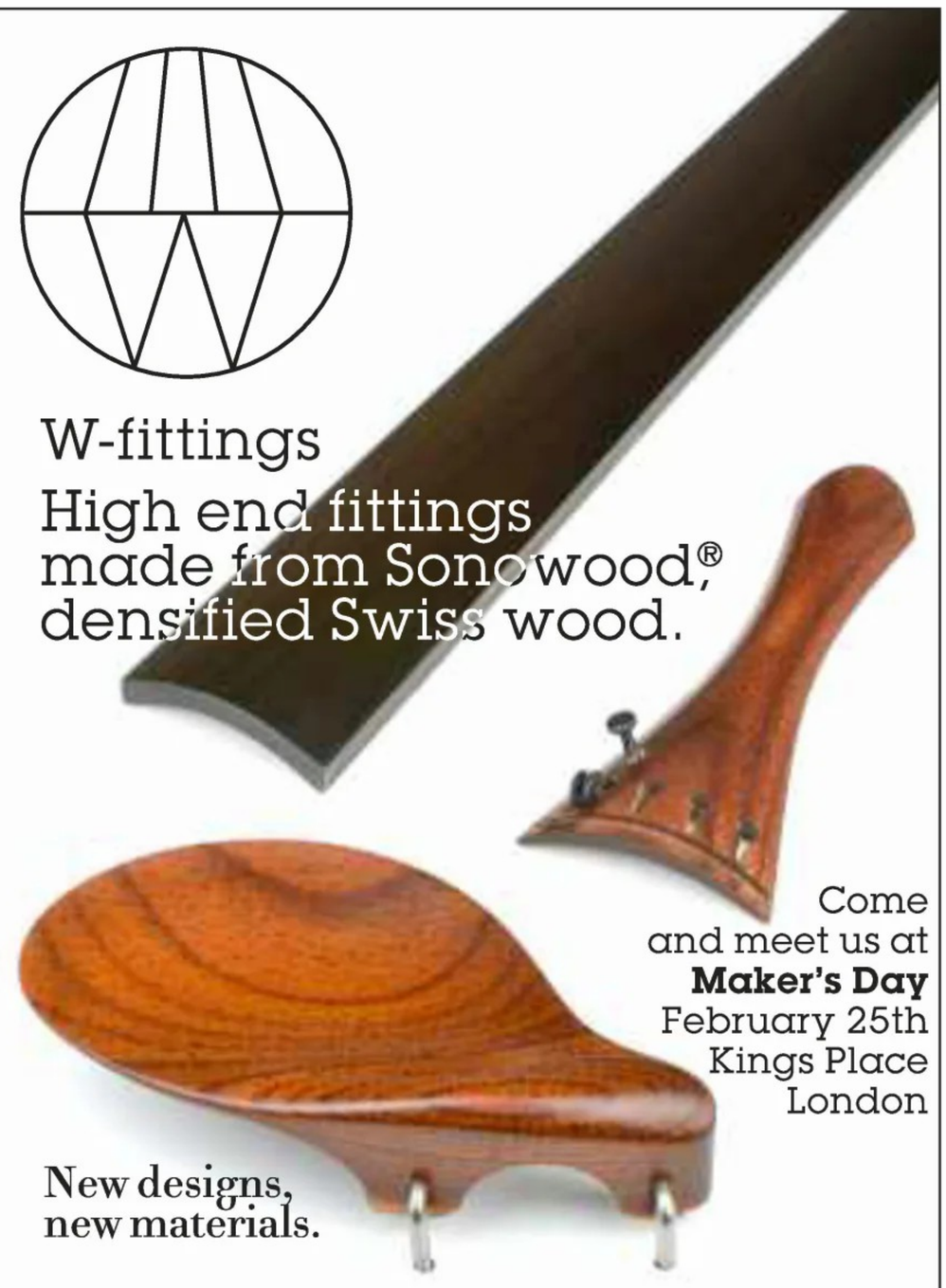

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Cellos

Stefano Scarampella, Mantua 1915 ● J.B. Vuillaume,Paris c.1853 ● Andrea Postachini, Fermo 1810-15 ● Vincent Postiglione, Naples c.1880 ● Oreste Martini, Mantua c. 1940 ● Carlo de March, Venice 1966 ● Paolo Vettori, Florence 2018 ● Francesco Toto, Cremona 2004 ● English, London c.1760 ● Jules Joseph Grandjon, Mirecourt 1886 ● W. Theodor Guttermann, Vienna 1862 ● Matthew Furber London c.1820 ● Rene Jacqueman, Paris 1933 ● Marco Nolli, Cremona 2004 ● Michele Dobner, Cremona 2007 ● Stefano Marzi, Bibbiena 2017 ● Maurizio Tadioli, Cremona 2003 ● Jonathan Cooper, Maine 2000 ● Hristo Todorov, Cremona 2020 ● Giuseppe Nupieri, Rome 1977 ● Pierre Hel workshop,Lille 1911 ● Raphael Le Cointe, Cremona 2004 ● H. Emile Blondelet, JTL workshop, Mirecourt 1919 ● Eugene Holtier, Cleveland 2019 ● Gabriel Pralea, Ferrara 2013 ● Martin Erician, Piacenza 1961 ● Kurt Moennig, Hamburg c.1940 ● Marco Pedrini, Cremona 2003 ● English, c.1800 ● Lillo Salerno Pforzheim 2022 ● Rainer Leonhardt, Mittenwald 2023 ● Yanbing Chen, Model Z-2600, Cleveland 2015 ● Clement & Weise, Model 340, Bubenreuth 2003 ● Clement & Weise, Model 330, Bubenreuth 2003 ● Les ateliers de la Dyle, Brussels 2020 ● Sergio Vespa, Beijing 2020 ● David Mahov, Cleveland 2007 ● Calin Wultur, Reghin 2020, 7/8 ● Gewa Meisterwerkstatten, "Marko Ackert", Mittenwald 2019 ● Petru Cristian Demeter, Reghin 2022 ● Gewa "Paris Antik" Mittenwald 2022 ● Johann Albrecht, Bayern 2020 ● Sandro Luciano, Model SL350, 2017 ● and many more.

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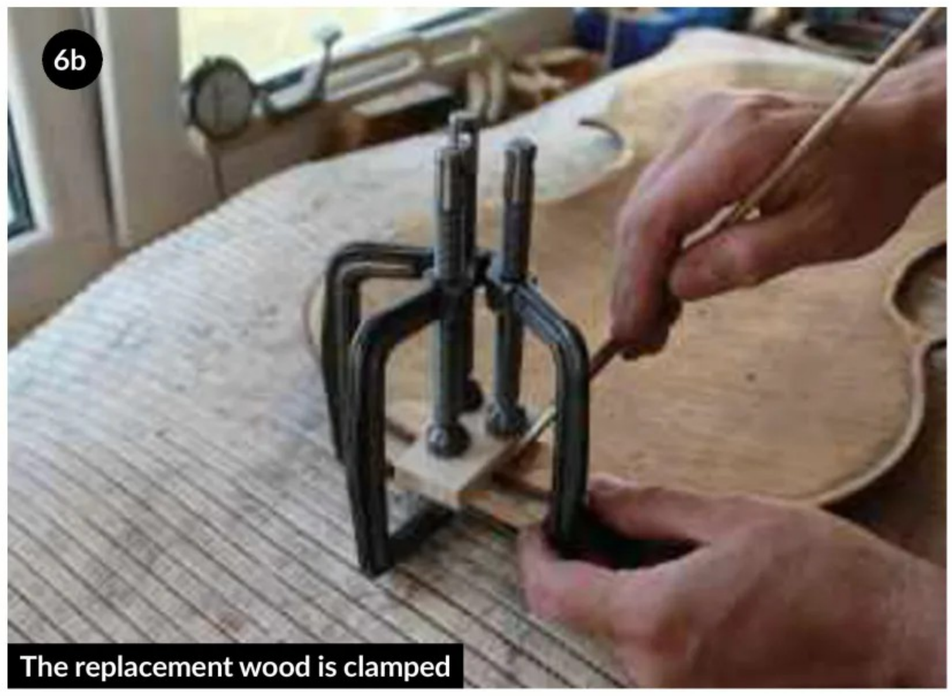
Fitting the piece to the back



The replacement wood is clamped

6 After fitting the piece to the back (6a), I proceed to glue it using hide glue. I use a wooden support, which I place between the clamps and the back, preventing damage to the back during tightening. The clamps apply pressure at just one point (6b), and the wooden support helps to distribute the pressure across the surface evenly. It also aids in the actual process of bonding the two parts together.

Shaping the surface

7 I wait about 24 hours for the glue to dry completely. Then I begin to shape the surface where the top-block will be attached. For this purpose, I use my favourite plane and a straightedge to check the surface for any irregularities.

Re-adding the purfling

8 Finally I replace the missing piece of the purfling and attach the back to the sides. The heel is now restored and, after a few more operations, the cello will be assembled and ready to play.

The cello, as an instrument, demands care and attention, especially when it comes to a repair such as heel restoration. With a serious approach and a passion for craftsmanship, even the most delicate parts of the cello can be restored to their former glory. Working on the heel is not just a repair: it's a revival of the instrument's musical spirit and its owner's connection to it. The art of cello repair is an opportunity to keep instruments alive and pass them on to the next generation of musicians with soulful value and beauty.

LUTHIERS

MARIUS LAUFER & CHRISTIAN KLEIN

LOCATION

Landshut, Germany

We've been working together in Landshut, about 40 miles north-east of Munich, since 2019. Before that, Marius worked in Vienna with the luthier Wilfried Ramsaier-Gorbach, who repaired instruments for the Vienna Philharmonic. He moved to Landshut in 2009 to open his own workshop. Christian, meanwhile, worked for the Roderich Paesold firm of instrument and bow making. As we were both based in Landshut, we knew each other and one day, over a good cup of coffee (very important in our workshop) we decided to go into business together.

The workshop is around 60 sq m and has gone through a lot of changes in the past three years. During the lockdown of 2021, we decided to rebuild it from the ground up, taking on nearly all the renovation work ourselves – with the help of skilled craftspeople who also happened to be our friends. We designed and installed acoustic absorbers and a recording system in a 40 sq m space directly adjoining the workshop, so that we could offer musicians a place to play, compare, and record. Our furniture in this room is on wheels so that we can host concerts and rehearsals there. We also have a seating area with a small play corner for children, so we can welcome very young musicians as well.

We extended our space again in 2023 by adding three additional rooms, all 60 sq m, on the first floor of the building. Now we can carry out woodworking downstairs and handle varnishing and bow-related activities upstairs, where we can keep things dust-free. The first floor also contains a storage and packing space for instruments. We also have a permanent exhibition of contemporary makers' work, and we love allowing musicians to come in and compare the instruments. We find equal excitement in witnessing the skill and artistry of our international fellow violin making colleagues.

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD

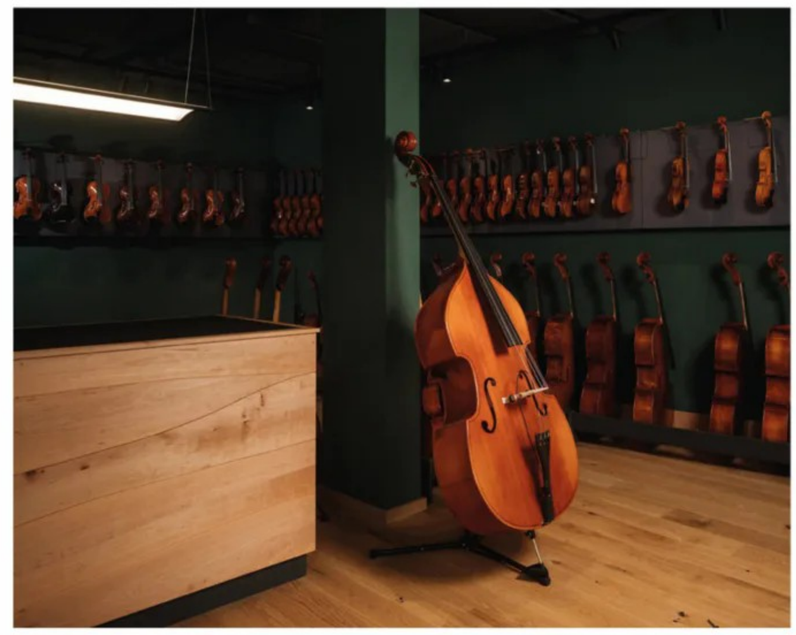
MAIN PHOTO T. BALZER-RIESEN. OTHER PHOTOS ALEXEY TESTOV

This viola is a truly special collaborative project. It has been crafted by a violin making couple in Ukraine who sent it to us to be varnished. It only remains to finish the set-up before the new owner from Landshut can make it sing.

On Marius's workbench is an unfinished white instrument and the neck with a scroll. Marius has been developing his own scroll design, which is based on the 'golden ratio' and has two turns spiralling out from the centre of the scroll.

This is our apprentice's workbench. She works simultaneously on four instruments, performing each step four times in a row. We believe that this is an effective method for ingraining processes and improving skills.

Right We believe that having green walls in our acoustically optimised room adds a touch of tranquillity, as it complements the organic wood tones of the instruments. It's all about creating an atmosphere.



Our craft follows a deeply traditional path, often mirroring the techniques of the great masters from the 17th and 18th century. Yet we embrace the advantages of modern technology – and so we are fascinated by the possibilities offered by sound analysis.

We rely on razor-sharp tools here. That's why we value our two wet grinding machines so much – one for the coarse preparation and the other for the fine finishing touches. It's a great feeling when an ultra-sharp tool effortlessly glides through the wood.

Golden rules

Violin maker **Wolfgang Schiele** argues that the influence of the 'golden ratio' on painting, architecture and lutherie supports the idea of a perfect form for instruments

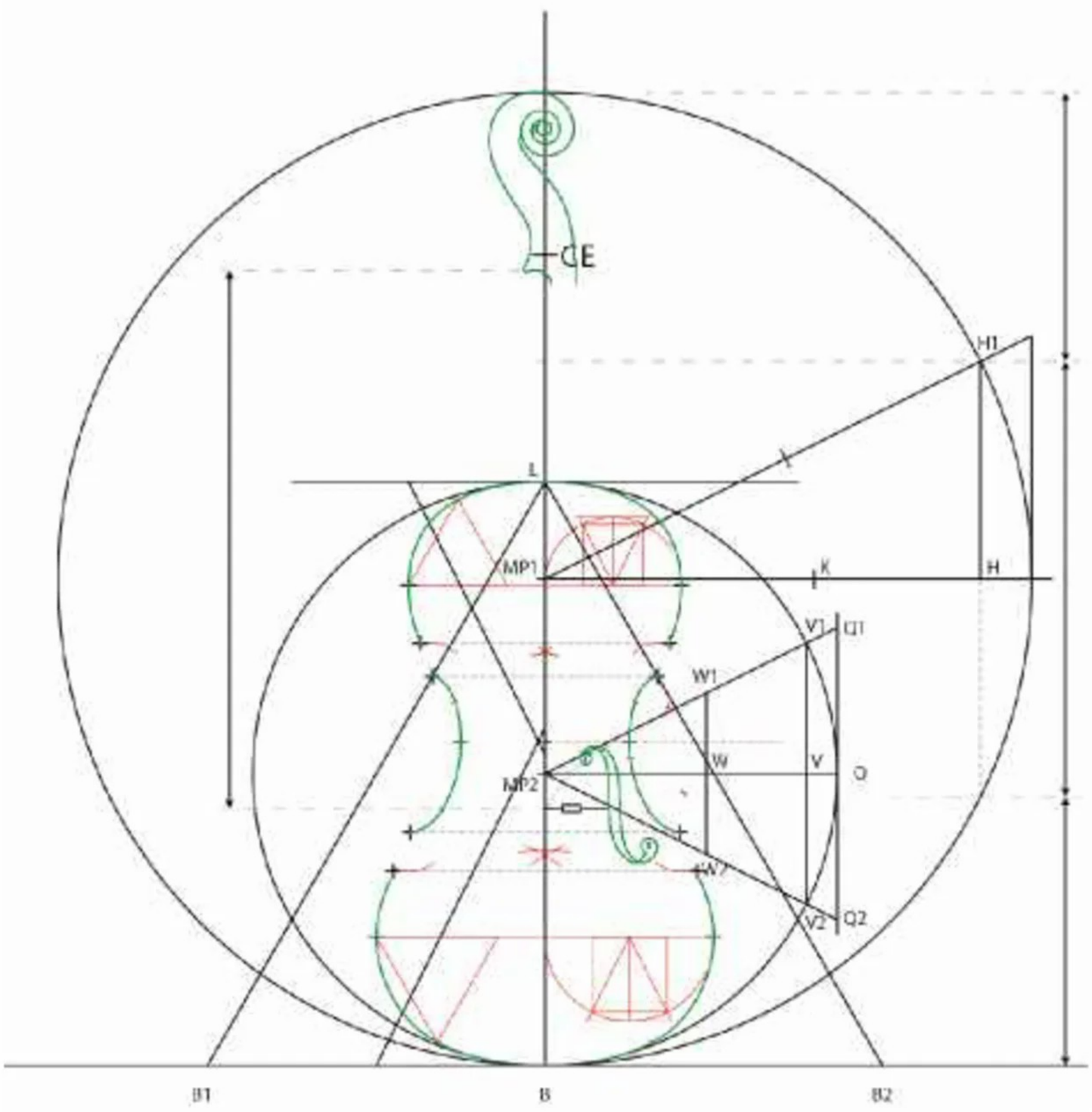


FIGURE 4 The overall instrument circle, containing all constructed measurements and the inside shape of the violin

Both music lovers and art connoisseurs will agree that the shape of the Baroque violin is perfect. It survived all efforts at improvement during the 19th and 20th centuries, and even today's luthiers are using the form to create not just musical instruments with exceptional qualities but also highly prized works of art. However, the question remains: how could this 'perfect' shape have been developed so successfully by the artisans of the early Baroque era?

In my efforts to (re-)construct the development of the violin's shape and proportions, I have worked out what I consider to be an ideal design from instruments by Nicolò Amati, Andrea Guarneri and Antonio Stradivari, all dating from around 1650 to 1670. All measurements, starting with the overall length of the instrument, are in specific proportional relation to one another, and all relate to the so-called 'golden ratio' of classical architecture.

During the Renaissance, there were many studies of and theories concerning the proportions of the human anatomy. At that time, people considered the human being to be 'in God's image' and therefore anatomically perfect. Consequently, architects aimed to develop a clear and harmonious relationship between all parts of a building, and to base them both on human dimensions (as divine proportions) and on the ideal proportions derived from the golden ratio (1.618 : 1, **figure 1**).

Because humans appeared to be 'designed' based on this ratio, and also because it can be found over and over again in the natural world, it seems logical that people find this ratio of proportions harmonious, even simply from an optical standpoint. For instance, all pentagonal five-petalled flowers, as well as hexagonal honeycombs and snowflakes, are directly related to the golden ratio. Consequently, buildings, pictures and sculptures based on these laws, whether consciously or unconsciously, are similarly balanced.

In 1509 the mathematician and theologian Luca Pacioli introduced the term 'divina proportione' for the first time as the title of a printed work, which he used to define the golden ratio. 'Divina proportione' for him stood symbolically with its three parts for the Holy Trinity.

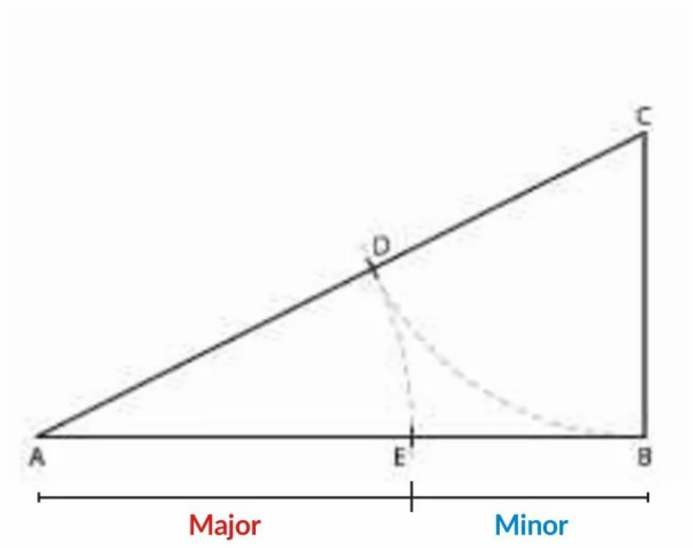


FIGURE 1 Basic construction of the golden ratio, which divides a given distance A–B into two sections – major : minor (1.618 : 1)

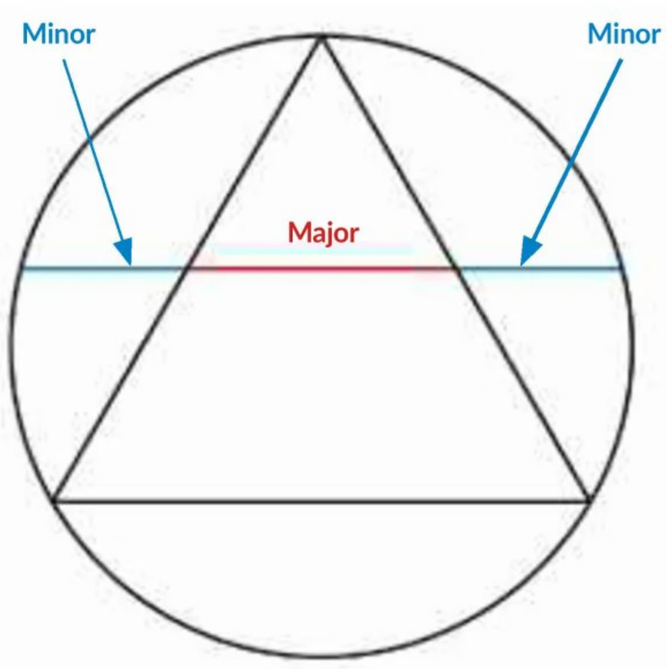


FIGURE 2 Equilateral triangle in a circle. A line drawn halfway up the triangle divides the circle into minor (above) and major (below) proportions

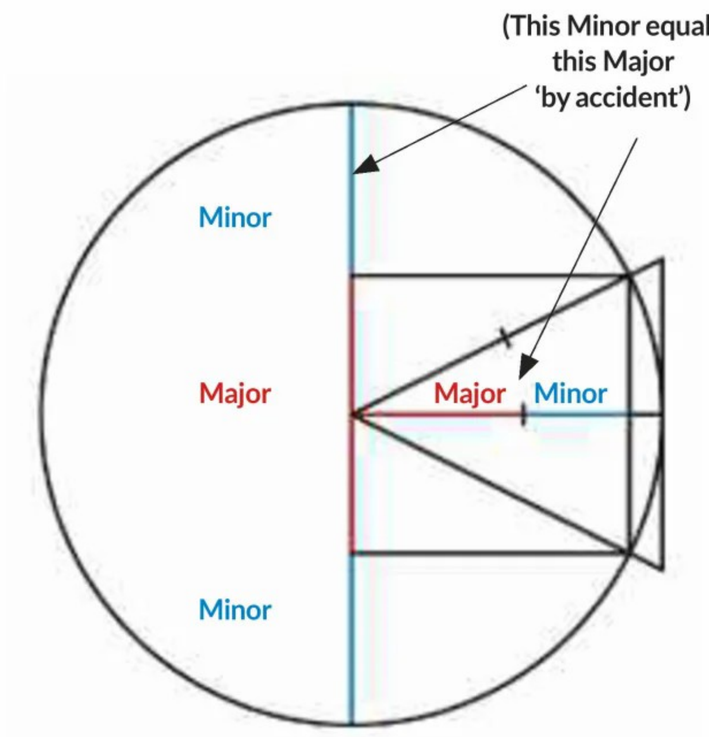


FIGURE 3 In this figure, the diameter of the circle is divided into the Major (the side of the square) and two corresponding Minors

Leonardo da Vinci is said to have coined the term *sectio aurea* (golden section); however, others claim that this term only originated in the 19th century.

THE CONSTRUCTION

Just four geometric elements are needed to construct the perfect violin model. These are the circle, the equilateral triangle (**figure 2**), the hexagon and a 'square in a semicircle' (**figure 3**), demonstrating the golden ratio on the diameter of a circle in a very special way. These elements have been known for 5,000 years, and in fact became the basis of a Greek philosophy on harmony and the cosmos. In the Middle Ages these geometric elements had symbolic meanings attributed to them. For instance, the circle stood for the heavenly or divine unity, while the equilateral triangle represented the Trinity on different levels (father, mother and son; the human being as body, mind and spirit; the universe as heaven, earth and humanity). The symbolic meaning of the square is the Earth (as opposed to the circle for the heavens). The hexagon – the double triangle or Star of David – indicates that every true analogy has to be applied inverted: as above, so beneath. It also represents the unification of opposites (male and female, positive and negative). In Christian symbolism it means perfection, completion, and the six days of the Creation.

Needless to say, our current metric system did not exist at the time of the Amati family. Hence, for the construction shown here, the basic unit of measurement is the Cremonese ell (484mm), which had been in use in this northern Italian region since the eleventh century. It can still be seen carved in stone on the clock tower of Cremona.

Quite clearly, there is no part or dimension of a violin that can be related even as a partial length of the Cremonese ell. But although it may now seem completely arbitrary, by extending the Cremonese ell by 20 per cent of its length, this new length (580.8mm) gives the overall length of the Baroque violin (and it should be said that this overall length varied quite a bit during that period).

Looking at **figure 4**, we can see that applying the square-in-a-semicircle construction for the first time gives us both the maximum width of the upper bouts and narrowest width of the C-bouts. Then the maximum width of the lower bouts is obtained simply by doubling the width of the C-bouts. Here it is important to mention that it is the *inner* outline of the body that is being constructed – the crucial part for the sound.

This works as follows. The square within a semicircle can either be constructed or calculated mathematically, by dividing the diameter of the circle by the square root of 5, as shown here:
Diameter of the overall circle: 580.8 : √5 = 259.7 : 2 = 129.8

Major (of the overall instrument circle) = |MP1 H| = 259.7mm

Minor (of the overall instrument circle) = |MP1 K| = 160.5mm
= width of upper bouts

(the minor of the overall circle corresponds to the major of the triangle MP2-V-V1)

Minor2 = | K H | = 99.2mm
= width of C-bouts

Minor2 x 2 = 198.4mm
= width of lower bouts

Since this construction is for the internal dimensions, you will need to add around 7–8mm. This would give measurements of around 168 / 106 / 206mm, with a body length of 351mm (as measured with callipers). ▹

THESE GEOMETRIC ELEMENTS BECAME THE BASIS OF A GREEK PHILOSOPHY ON HARMONY AND THE COSMOS

ALL DIAGRAMS WOLFGANG SCHIELE

Scroll length = 580.8 - 129.8 - 343.6 = 107.4mm

This construction results in a neck length of 106mm, according to today's method of measurement: from the top edge of the top to the lower line of the upper saddle. This corresponds to the length of a Baroque neck, which is slightly shorter than the modern one. It should again be noted, though, that the length of the Baroque violin varied quite considerably.

Now we turn to the second part of the construction, in which the inside length of the body is constructed over the largest lower width using an equilateral triangle, which serves as the diameter for the body circle. The determination of the height at which the greatest upper and lower widths will be situated is determined using the basic construction of the golden ratio on the right-angled triangle depending on these widths.

4 x m_2 = base length for equilateral triangle for the body

4 x 99.2mm =396.8mm x 86.6% = 343.6mm = inner length of the body

= L on | A B |

Again, the height of the equilateral triangle can either be constructed and measured, or it can be calculated mathematically by multiplying the length of one side of the triangle by 86.6%.

The intersection of these two golden-ratio triangles results in the position of the narrowest mean width. Violins by Nicolò Amati as well as most of his students show a deep hole in the back at this point, drilled with a funnel-shaped tool. This was sometimes even visible on the outside. Later, after the graduations of the back were finished, the hole was filled up with a small dowel. This has therefore always been assumed to be an important construction point. It would be nice to collect data on whether the dowel is actually situated at the narrowest mean width of the backs – so if colleagues have information about this, I would be pleased if they would share it with me. It is certain that it appears at the strongest point of the back. In Stradivari models, the narrowest mean width is situated slightly higher towards the neck.

Several subsequent steps are required to construct the linear expansion of the body's central area, as well as the reversal points between the concave corner areas and the convex outline areas. These also require the use of second square-in-a-semicircle construction.

Once these have all been constructed, the outline can be added using relatively simple means. Each of the three sub-areas of the upper, middle and lower sections consists of three circle segments that can be easily constructed with a compass.

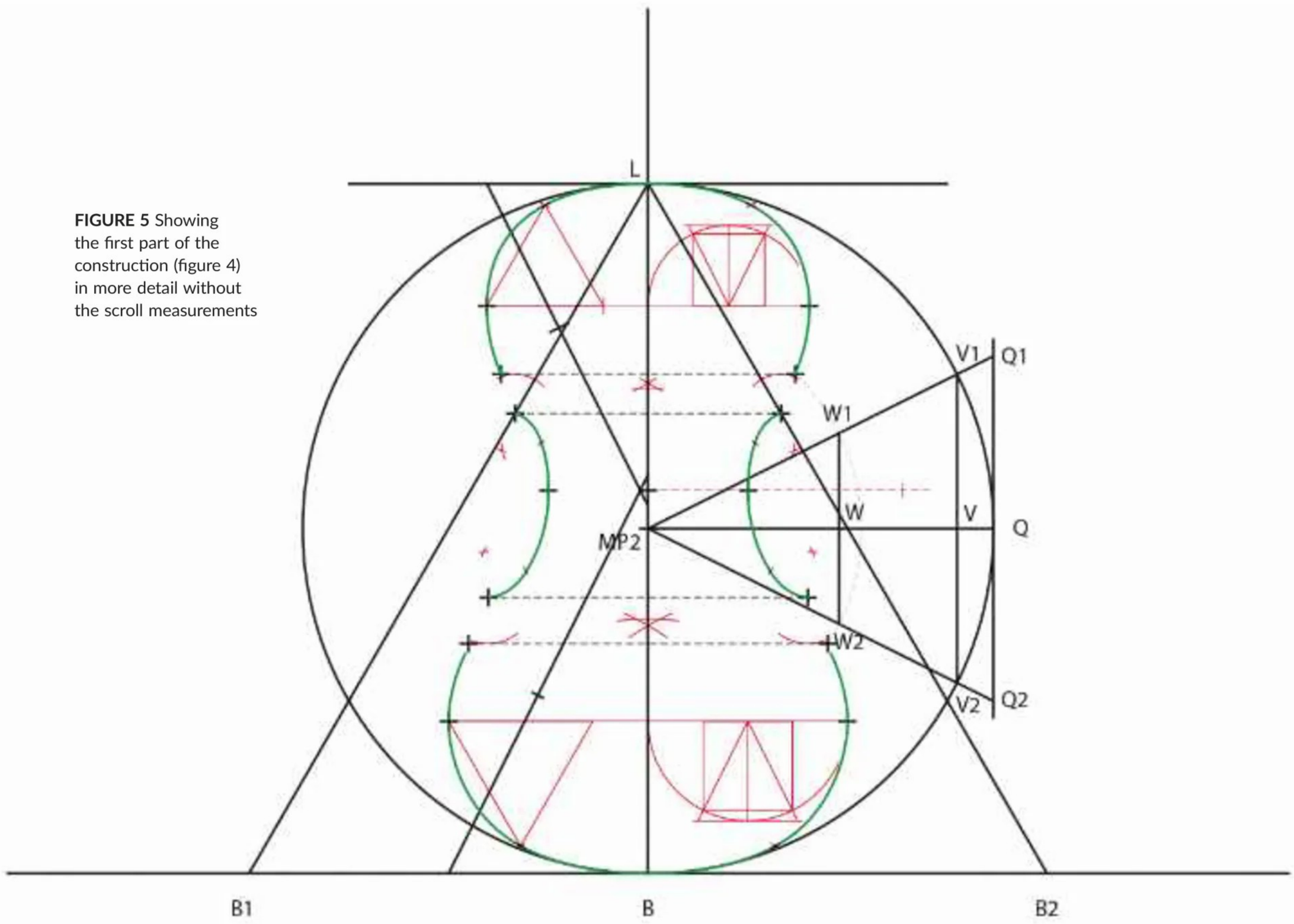


FIGURE 5 Showing the first part of the construction (figure 4) in more detail without the scroll measurements

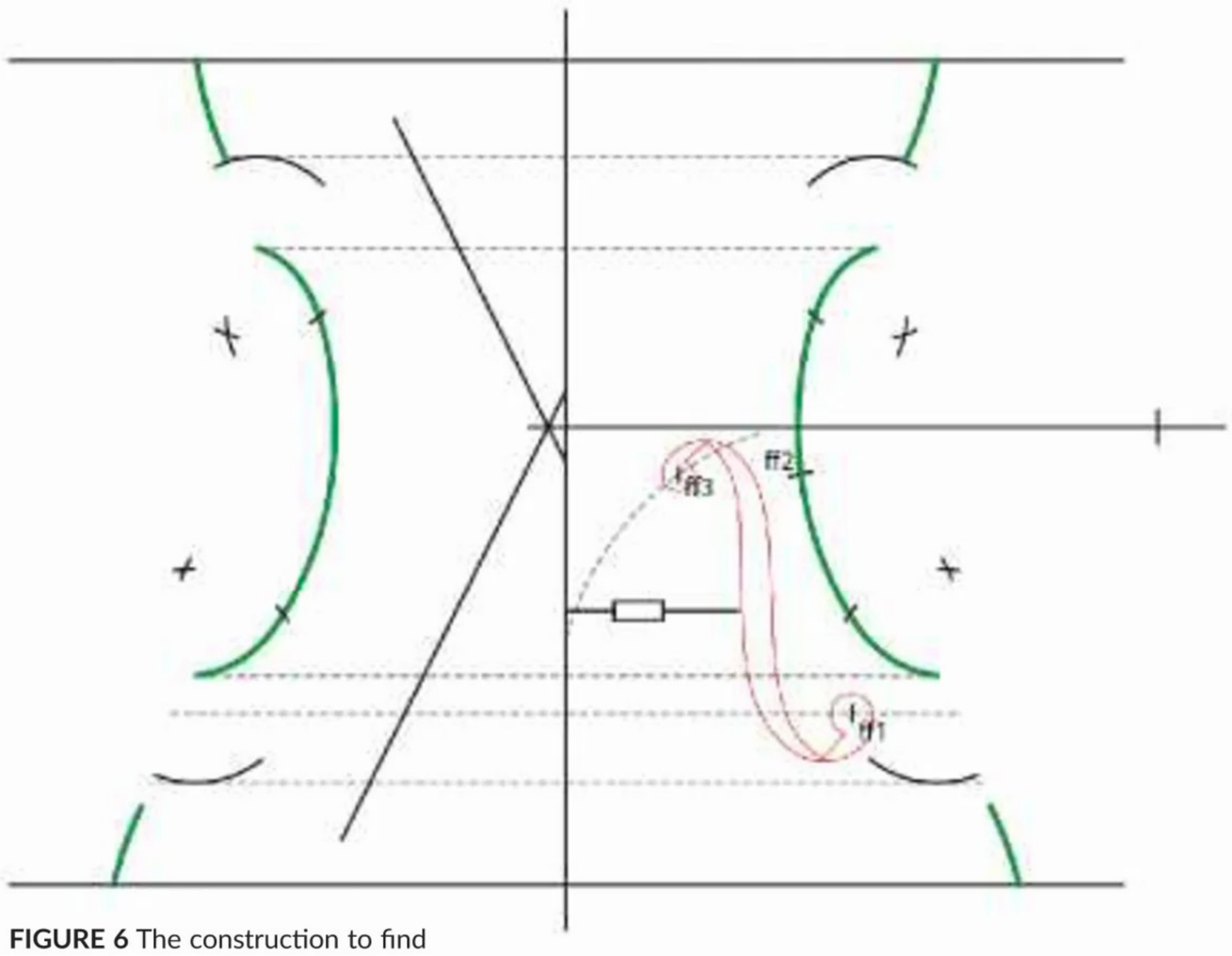


FIGURE 6 The construction to find the position and size of the f-holes

THE HEIGHT OF THE SIDES, BACK, TOP AND BRIDGE CAN ALL BE FOUND BY USING SIMPLE GEOMETRIC MEANS

The third construction section is used to calculate the position and the size of the f-holes (**figure 6**). It is essentially achieved through another square-in-a-semicircle construction, in direct continuation of the body circle. This f-hole construction has come down to us in several versions for various instruments by Antonio Stradivari, as we know them from the Museo del Violino in Cremona.

It will probably never be possible to prove that the following part of the construction (**figure 7**) was used as early as the 17th century. But it shows in an astonishing way that the height of the sides, back, top and bridge can be found by using simple geometric means. Even the position of the bass-bar and the soundpost can be determined. The constructed heights of the back, top and sides correspond to the common dimensions of historical instruments, just as the constructed positions of the soundpost and bass-bar correspond to today's common and acoustically sensible positions.

To construct the cross-section of the violin body at the location of the body stop, we use the width of the body at this point. This represents the diameter of a cross-sectional circle. With the help of the radius, two equilateral triangles overlapping in opposite directions are obtained. The sides of the equilateral triangles that taper to points A1 and A2 are halved in length. By connecting the

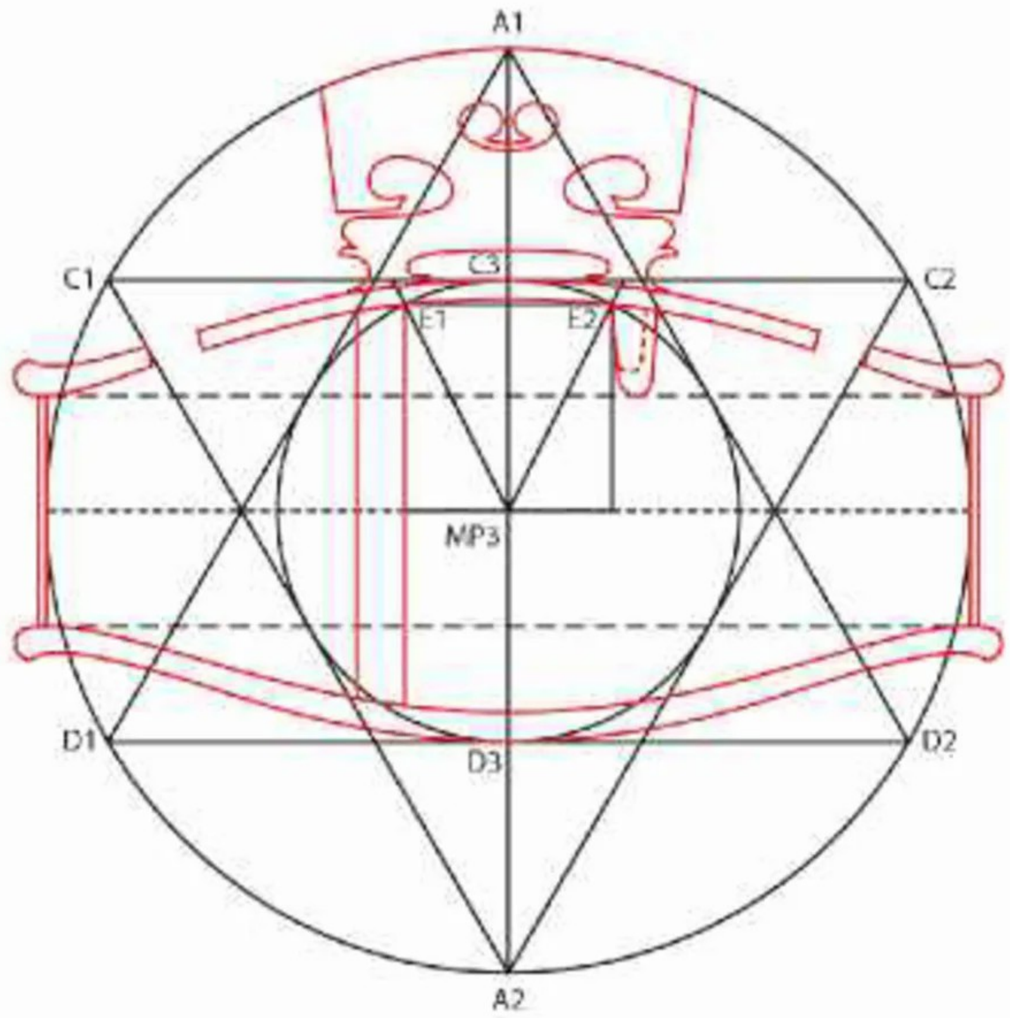


FIGURE 7 The construction to find the heights of the sides, back, top and bridge is based on a hexagon shape

points found in this way and extending these distances up to the circle (golden ratio on the equilateral triangle in a circle), the height of the violin's sides is determined. The intersection points of the horizontal sides of the equilateral triangles (| C1 C2 | and | D1 D2 |) with the central axis result in the points C3 and D3, and thus mark the highest points of the top and back respectively.

The arched shapes of the back and the top itself have no connection to the outline construction. For the sake of completeness, however, I would like to mention that the curvatures drawn here are so-called ordinary cycloids. They are created when a point is rolled along the radius of a circle. This principle was presented in detail by Quentin Playfair in the November 1999 issue of *The Strad*. I also use it in the construction of my instruments, as I am convinced that the bridge pressure can be dissipated most evenly in this way.

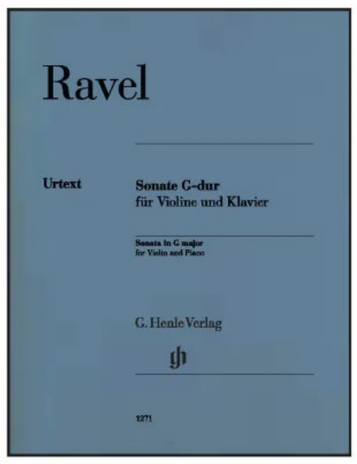
The time when I discovered or rediscovered that the shape and even the third dimension of the violin could be constructed by these described geometrical means, more than twenty years ago now, was a highly exciting one. Space restrictions meant that I had to cut short the descriptions of the construction steps, but I hope this article has allowed me to communicate my fascination for this dimension of violin making. ●

ALL DIAGRAMS WOLFGANG SCHIELE

MASTERCLASS

RAVEL VIOLIN SONATA NO.2, SECOND MOVEMENT 'BLUES'

Violinist **Curtis Stewart** looks at how to get the most from the different styles Ravel used, and how questions that arise from their juxtaposition are arguably more important than answers



From Ravel Violin Sonata in G major. Urtext edition with marked and unmarked string parts. Ed. Ulrich Krämer. Pf. fingering Pascal Rogé. Vln fingering and bowing Christian Tetzlaff. Order no. HN 1271. ISMN 979-0-2018-1271-7 €23.00. Printed with permission of G. Henle Verlag, München © 2016

One of the classes I teach at Juilliard is on performance practice of the blues and I feel this piece is a perfect place for classical string players to start. Writing in 1927 against a backdrop of industrialisation, Ravel clearly immersed himself in the American jazz that found its way to Paris because he emulates it so well, while framing it within his own language. Elements of his style, such as the impressionistic polytonality and orchestral voicing, ornament the structure in such a perfect way that it can be heard as a commentary on the blues from the perspective of early 20th-century French art music.

Two worlds

A key question is how 'bluesy' to make the second movement of the Violin Sonata no.2. You can really inhabit that style, bending and breaking the rhythm and adding growl-type sounds which mimic extreme vocal techniques. But those things are atypical in classical performance, especially on the violin, so it's about understanding where they are most important in the composer's framework, and bringing those moments into relief by playing other sections in a style more typical of Ravel.

If the first movement takes us into a world of the past, with its Baroque rhythms and Renaissance-flavour polytonality, then the beginning of the second movement immediately interrupts that, bringing us into the modern world with strummed chords imitating a guitar. The pianissimo here is actually very marked and rhythmically intense even though it might be soft in terms of decibels. It's as if we are approaching a blues guitarist from a distance. In my mind, I put a staccato dot on each chord and mute the natural resonance of pizzicato chords on the violin by lifting the first finger of the left hand slightly after each strum to make a drier, more driven sound.

THE SOLOIST

NAME
CURTIS STEWART

NATIONALITY
AMERICAN

STUDIED WITH
MARK STEINBERG, LYNN BLAKESLEE, DIANE MONROE

RECORDS FOR
NEW AMSTERDAM, BRIGHT SHINY THINGS AND OTHERS

'It's somewhere between a fun, flirtatious dance rhythm and something quite military'

Alongside his recording of Julia Perry's Violin Concerto, Curtis Stewart will be performing the Ravel at Alice Tully Hall on 16 March. Other performances in March 2024 include new commissions for the Chicago Symphony, Oregon Symphony and Orchestra MusicNOW.

TITILAYO AYANGADE

Each forte in this section emphasises the typical blues chord changes from I to IV, I to V and so on, and should sound like a 'shuffle', slightly pushing the metrical stability rather than being played as big, round accents. Around bar 7 you want the pizzicato to sound especially assertive so that the mystery of the piano's entry in A flat major against the simple G major strums is heightened. In choosing an A flat and E flat for the piano's first bar and a half, which can absolutely be heard as blues notes in G major, Ravel creates an ambiguity – are the two instruments inhabiting different worlds or not? To my mind it's important that both players are clear stylistically. If the violin sounds like a blues guitar and the piano sounds wonderfully soft and impressionistic, then the intended question mark of the piece comes through here more strongly.

The ambiguities continue throughout this movement, starting three bars before figure 1 where the piano line suggests phrasing to the down-beat but the violin's forte seems to demand the emphasis comes on the fourth beat. You can justify either, but what is often more interesting is to ask the questions.

Role models for style

With the long cantabile section for the violin from figure 1, it is our prerogative to model our sound on the best blues singers we can find. I would recommend borrowing from Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Nancy Wilson whose voices were so naturally clean that you can hear exactly how long a slide is, when the vibrato might start (and how wide it is) and how rich or breathy the tone is. The marking here to play nostalgically, on the A string, suggests to me that more of a breathiness is called for and to achieve that I might press down only lightly with the left hand. It also helps if the hand is constantly in motion, squid-like, so that the slides happen organically and don't take too long.

The phrase from figure 1 introduces this first melodic idea but peppers it with questions and side notes, and it's only with the restatement from figure 2 that we have more of a settled sense of where we are. A slide in places like the fourth bar of figure 2 is a great way to accentuate this new confidence.

Having been led to think we are in E flat major, the brief key change at figure 3 is startling enough to nudge the music into a subtly different style. I can't help but hear the quavers (♪) as swung notes here although one could choose Ravel's more impressionistic voice instead of the blues style and make a virtue of playing them straight. Either way, the written-in slides need to be managed and not extreme. I tend to favour a cross between a Kreisler shift and a Russian shift and, in bar 46, more of a rough glissando than three distinct notes. The main thing is that the slides emphasise the note of arrival, whether in a rhythmic or an impressionistic way.

At figure 4 the *piano* dynamic has to be full of latent energy. We have had a moment of lightness with the dotted crotchet–quaver (♩. ♪) material in the previous section and now the first theme reasserts itself, making a striking impression even with the half-phrases. And if the *piano* statement was ready to burst, then the mezzoforte four bars later is positively boiling over.

Forebodings

The pizzicato chords at figure 5 are a nod to the piano's gentle, alternating bass-line in figure 3 and as such, I think they can be quite resonant. We have heard a lot of piano by this stage so a dry sound would not come across as well as at the beginning, in addition to which, we are playing a slightly different role here. The main interest is between the straight four-time accompaniment and the hemiolas played first in the piano by the right hand and then shared in canon with the violin. It's somewhere between a fun, flirtatious dance rhythm and something quite military: a pre-echo of the pizzicato snare-drum effect from figure 7 onwards in the violin part. So, the pizzicato theme from bar 72 can have a really direct sound, which fits naturally with the amount of force needed to make the plucked slide in bar 75, and the phrase drives right to the C natural in the bar before figure 6.

With the theme at figure 6 Ravel seems most fully himself – Romantic and expressive – with not a little hint of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* thrown in. It pays to embrace the syncopation in places like bars 83 and 88. And consider adding texture to the triplets (♬), not only with left-hand slides but also a little extra bow pressure to get that gravelly vocal quality mentioned at the start. The music becomes more and more impassioned as the triplets repeat and then another startling moment at figure 7 offsets the beauty and points towards something altogether different and unyielding, which has been driving the movement.

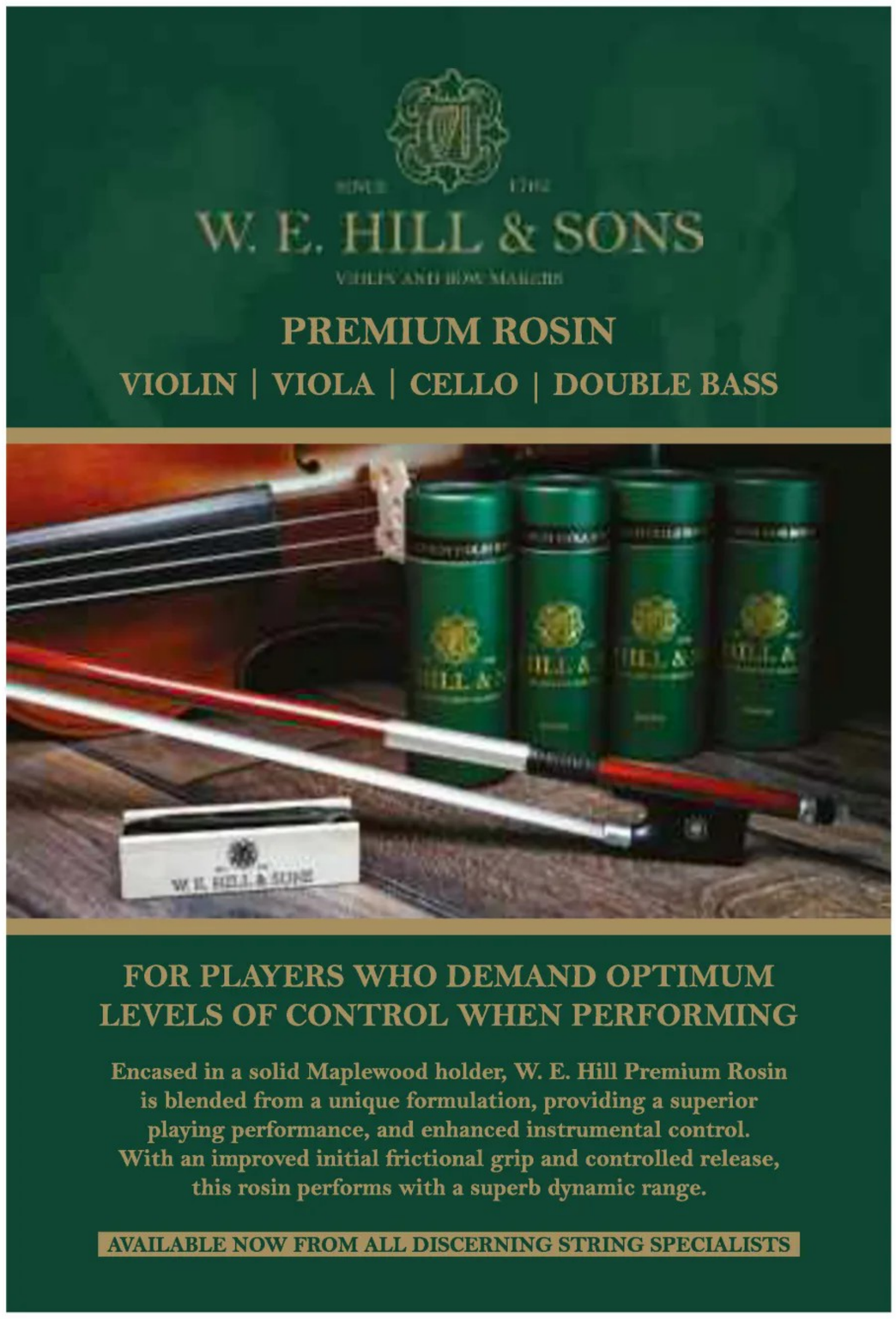
Conflict

The military idea really comes to the fore from this point onwards and the strummed snare drum effect, while being very held, rhythmically, should sound wild and out of control. As the piano no longer has steady crotchets (♩) here but quite involved melodic writing, the violinist has to take up as much space as possible as they adopt this rhythmic role. It is as if this drive propels the violin to sing the first theme way up high at figure 9, reversing roles again with the piano and pulling against its foursquare rhythmic insistence with the sweet, yearning blues theme. I imagine someone from a simple country life drafted into the military, who is calling back for what they had.

Evaporation

Although the melody appears to resolve at figure 10, the music drives onwards, changing and modulating right up until the flourish at figure 12. Along with the final flourish in bar 144, this is such a Ravelian chord that it leaves us wondering whether the world of the blues, and even the machine-like world underneath, were in fact a dream and we have actually been in Ravel's world all along. It could be heard as a commentary on the direction of the 20th century, or simply enjoyed as a masterful combination of different musical worlds. ▹

INTERVIEW BY HELENA RUINARD



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Blues

strummed – like a guitarist on a porch far away

Moderato ♩ = 108

pizz.

~~pp~~

mp – mf

nostalgico

sul La

arco

warm

like spreading butter

wide vibrato

light

big

slide on up bow with second finger

fall-offs

possible ricochet

sul tasto

open up – very vocal

fall-offs

sul Ré

caterpillar slide

Klav.

airy and warm

dance

Kreisler shift

smush!

sul Sol

super smush!

sul Sol

sul La

flowing and open

more intensity

59

0
0
pizz.

p

64

5

March-like, less strummed

1 2 3 4 5 6

Klav.

pp

71

clear, incisive

(pizz.)

mf

quasi-swing

76

6

Klav.

80

3
arco
sul La

p

87

Gershwin-esque

build up momentum

93

7 wild!

sul ponticello

ff

military, unrelenting

pizz.

mf

96

gliss.

f

100

mf

8

104

f

1
arco

Klav.

(p)

precise, almost light but intense

108

9

ff

sing!

112

fall-off

almost sad

fall-offs

117

10

pizz.

122

126

11

131

135

12

arco

sul La

p

almost out of time

139

sul tasto

sardonic, tongue in cheek, a dark joke

ricochet

It's a gift

Learn to love the lower half of your bow

JACK LIEBECK

Emile Sauret professor of violin at the Royal Academy of Music, London, UK

BORN
London, UK

STUDIED WITH
Mateja Marinkovic

TEACHES
ages 18–30

When I am teaching, I find it fundamentally important to communicate to my students that there should be softness of touch with the bow hold; the bow shouldn't be gripped. I think that I probably take this to extremes but in order to make a beautiful sound we need to learn how to use the nature of the bow and the violin without interfering too much.

If we play in the upper half of the bow, we have to use leverage to make the sound, but if we play in the lower half the bow will just sit on the string without any pressure being exerted, and make a sound without much effort. If we work out how much the bow gives us without doing anything, all we need to do is add.

Too often I see students nullify the nature of the bow by holding it in the air, putting it on the string and pulling without releasing it naturally into the string. A symptom of this is that they then tend to play near the fingerboard in the upper half of the bow and have little control of the position of the bow with regard to its contact point between the bridge and the fingerboard. They usually find playing in the lower half uncomfortable and because of this they shy away from it. This further compounds the situation.

THE ETHOS

I like to address this issue with my students by requiring them to live intensively in the lower half of the bow during their practice, to play by the bridge and to practise their pieces there, only going into the upper half when releasing and 'having a go'. If we find some comfort at the frog and get used to playing in the lower half using the natural bow weight, the bow will sit next to the bridge for hours, with little effort, as long as the bow speed is right. More bow does not mean more sound; it often means a much less intense and projected sound.

It is a bit like traction with tyres. If a car is driving at 30 miles per hour, we want the wheels to be turning at the speed that the car is travelling (not at 60 or 100mph or the car will go sideways). So, if we use too fast a bow speed for the pressure that we are putting into the string, the bow will go on to the fingerboard. However, if the bow moves slowly it will sit by the bridge with no effort at all. In fact, a slow bow speed is equivalent to putting pressure on the string, and this enables us to get much more out of the string than is otherwise possible.

To get the best results at the heel, the bowing hand needs to be soft and fluid, allowing the weight of the bow itself to create the sound.

KAUPO KIKKAS

The motto of my violin class is 'slower, lower'; for a fun take on this, view the following reel from my Instagram account: bitly.ws/33VVV (*right*). Here I play part of the Sibelius Violin Concerto on a tiny bow brought as a joke to one of our lessons by a student.

When playing, I remember I felt the sensation of being strangled, confirming that I very much think of my bow as being associated with my breath.

As you watch, notice that my hand on this 'bow' is super soft and that the bow is positioned by the bridge. However, my students were amused that I could do so much with so little. Judging by the way it went viral on Instagram, this resonated with many others too.

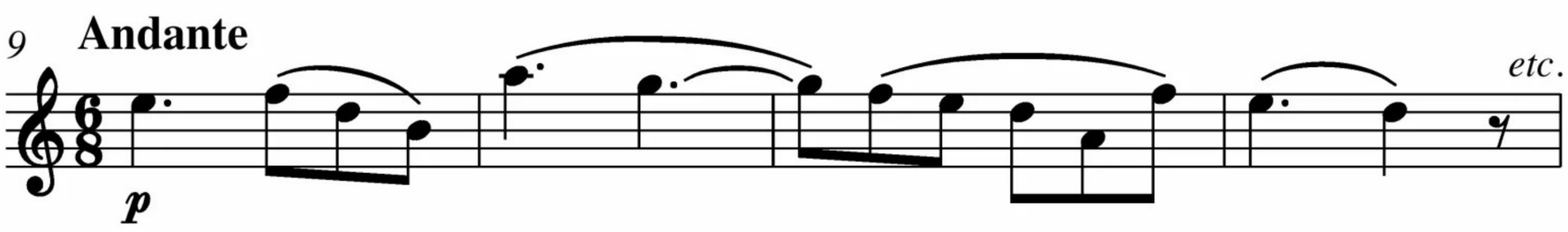
FIRST EXERCISES

- Rest your bow on the violin to find its balance point (roughly a third of the way along the bow). Hold the balance for a few moments.
- Now play some open strings in the lower half. Hold the bow super loosely, as though you were holding the stem of a wine glass, using tippy-tappy fingers. The violin will support the bow.
- Drop the bow on to the string to start, then draw it slowly, feeling the drag of the string with your fingertips. Don't worry if the sound is bad or scratchy at first; it doesn't matter how it sounds in the short term, as long as you are following the key principles of playing in an organic way. After all, how many times did you fall over before you learnt to walk? And then how long was it before you didn't keep falling over? Manage your expectations and allow yourself some time to get used to the feel.
- Play near the bridge with an ultra-slow bow speed, slower than you think you can. The violin responds very well to being starved of 'air'.
- You will need to play with these very slow bows regularly, to build faith that you won't drop the bow or crack the sound as you play

REPERTOIRE

To perform the second movement of the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto (**example 1**), much of which is marked *piano* or *mezzo piano*, with a sound that will cut through with an orchestra and reach the last rows of a concert hall, it is vital to play with a slow bow near the bridge. People often associate playing near the bridge with producing a harsh, fortissimo sound. In reality it means quality (harking back to the car analogy above, it means 'fully engaged clutch'). Practise this and other similar phrases further in the movement in the lower half of the bow, near the bridge. In performance you might allow yourself the release of moving a little further into the upper half but the main essence and core of the sound will be created in the lower half. ▹

EXAMPLE 1 Excerpt from Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor op.64 second movement



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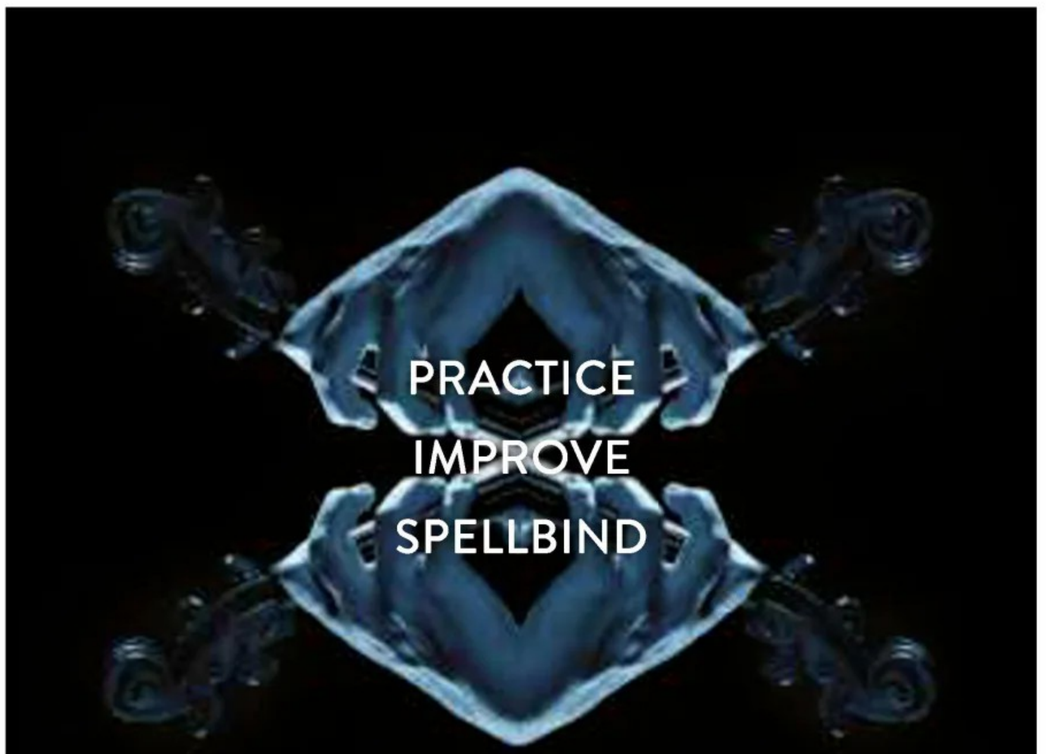

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IN YOUR PRACTICE

- Have an idea of what you want to do musically before you put the bow on the string. Remember that practising is where you compare what you want in your imagination with what comes out of the instrument and then try to close that gap. At first this might seem challenging but even if you decide against your original musical idea, at least you are putting parameters into your playing which you can then adjust at a later date.
- Singing, dancing and conducting are always healthy places to start. And remember that these can be done in the relative safety of your practice room, so don't allow embarrassment to get in your way.
- In your warm-up play some slow scales in the lower half of the bow. Release the bow. Don't try to force it; just drag it really slowly.
- Be patient and practise slowly (avoid smashing through pieces at full speed)
- When you practise pieces, make sure that you keep to the lower half of the bow. This means that you have to be careful to work out your bow divisions, saving bow in the smallest part of the phrase, and expanding speed a little to create shape. Work this to the stage where your default contact point is near the bridge. This will necessitate practising consistently in this way.
- Once you are used to this way of practising, you can ease this up in performance. However, you will find that you will come to prefer playing in the lower half owing to the control it affords you. Of course, we do use the whole bow at times, but basing yourself in the lower two-thirds of the bow rather than the upper two-thirds will be much more successful in performance.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- Check that your student is bowing straight to the bridge
- Avoid over-exaggeration of finger movements when changing bow. We don't want the tail to wag the dog – fingers on the bow should move as a natural reaction to the movement of the arm, and not have a life of their own.
- Consider using a removable cable tie to prevent your student's bow going into the upper half of the bow. When practising, it is very easy for students to be distracted by all the other things they are working on, and this will be a constant reminder.
- Start with an idea, then build it; help students to find the shape of a passage, then practise it in the lower half with that in mind (use more and less bow within these parameters). Only then allow them to release and go a little higher up the bow once the shape and control have built.
- Encourage students to think that playing just one centimetre from the bridge should be their normal playing zone (the fingerboard is just for special Debussy- or Ravel-like flautando colours), and to keep to the mantra of bowing in the lower part of the bow
- Keep in mind that the violin and the bow would like to work together without our interference; we are just the energy source
- As your students progress with these ideas, their fingers should become super reactive on the bow stick, feeling the string with their fingers, each finger reading what the string is doing through the bow
- Playing mostly in the upper half of the bow worked for Heifetz, but he was a genius!

INTERVIEW BY NAOMI YANDELL

FURTHER MATERIALS

As I boy I was fascinated by **Itzhak Perlman**'s bowing. His right hand is so soft and fluid but he has masterful control. See an example here: bitly.ws/33VZG

Janine Jansen makes a beautiful (and enormous) sound. Watch how she draws it out with a super-slow bow near the bridge. See an example here: bitly.ws/33VZT

NEXT MONTH
Cellist and singer Matthew Sharp on interconnectedness between cello and voice

Reviews

Your monthly critical round-up of performances, recordings and publications

CONCERTS

THIS MONTH'S RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS
Our pick of the new releases

Kathleen Parlow: a historic great remembered
PAGE 86

Hugely characterful playing from **Frank Peter Zimmermann**
PAGE 87

Gidon Kremer: keeping it personal
PAGE 90

Philadelphia

A feast of an evening from the Formosa Quartet

FORMOSA QUARTET, HSIN-YUN HUANG (VIOLA) PETER WILEY (CELLO)
AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY 3 DECEMBER 2023

The language of food often shows up in writing about music, because some concerts are absolutely delicious, such as this one with the Formosa Quartet, presented by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. But the main-course finale, Dvořák's String Sextet, was almost eclipsed by a first half of tasty appetisers.

Introducing five startling pop and jazz morsels, violinist Wayne Lee pointed out a wad of aluminium foil attached to the bridge of Deborah Pae's cello bridge, which created an appealing rattle for Stéphane Grappelli's *Star Eyes* (1943). From composer Dana Wilson came *The night of H's* (2008), a ball of nervous energy using a poem by violinist Jasmine Lin. And the quartet conjured the smokiest of jazz lounges with a Taiwanese folk song *Rain Night Flower*, arranged in 2016 by Wei-Chieh Lin and Lin's catchy arrangement of *Minor Swing* (1937) by Grappelli and Django Reinhardt.

Perhaps most striking was *Plakala* (2018), a song from the Ukrainian singer Kazka, arranged by Clancy Newman, a cellist who produced a recent album for the quartet. With Pae and her colleagues gathered around her – Lin focusing on the pegs, violist Matthew Cohen wearing gloves for pizzicatos and Lee crouched on the floor with an extra bow – the result pulsated like a happy, amoebic life form.

As an opener came Haydn's 'Fifths' Quartet op.76 no.2 – sprightly, with rhythmic verve. And in the Dvořák, violist Hsin-Yun Huang and cellist Peter Wiley helped create a surprisingly meaty timbre. The finale, accelerating gleefully to the end, brought the house down.

BRUCE HODGES

SAM ZAUSCHER

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MUSICIANS FROM MARLBORO

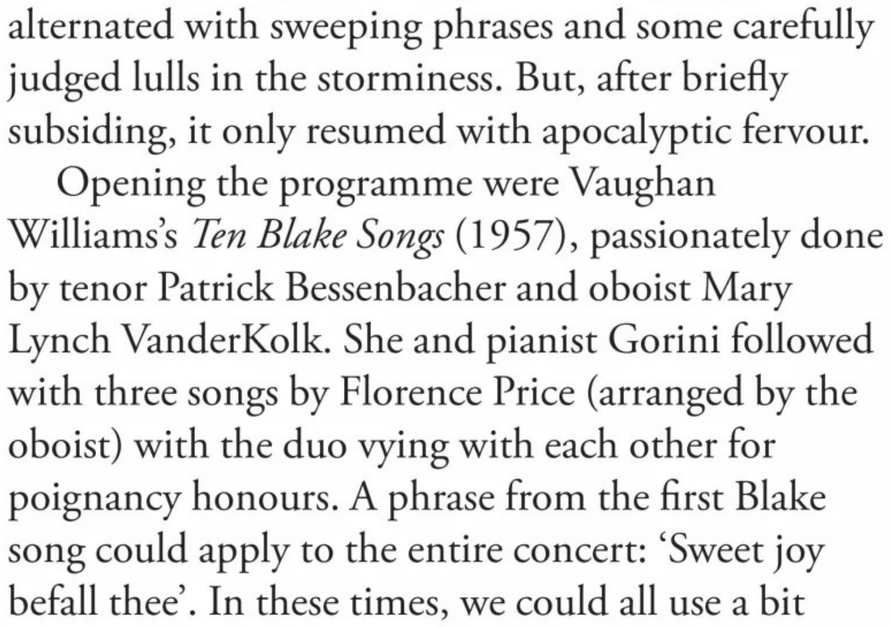
AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY 6 DECEMBER 2023

For the second of this Musicians from Marlboro series (the first was reviewed last month), the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society presented six more artists with ties to the venerable Vermont festival.

The pearl of the evening turned out to be Brahms's Second Piano Quartet op.26, with Itamar Zorman (violin), Haesue Lee (viola), Brannon Cho (cello) and Filippo Gorini (piano). In the stormy first movement, Zorman set the pace, with his three collaborators showing the kind of teamwork that makes great chamber music the most satisfying intellectual and emotional journey. The second movement basked in a keen attention to phrasing – gentle swells rather than the opening movement's climaxes – giving it an epic feel. In the third-movement Scherzo, more passion rained down, with broad bow strokes countered with Gorini's forceful keyboard accents, and the final chord was delivered with impressive resonance which seemed to hang in the air of the venerable hall. The foursome reserved maximum drama for the final movement, which was electrically charged with vigour. Punchy rhythms alternated with sweeping phrases and some carefully judged lulls in the storminess. But, after briefly subsiding, it only resumed with apocalyptic fervour.

Opening the programme were Vaughan Williams's *Ten Blake Songs* (1957), passionately done by tenor Patrick Bessenbacher and oboist Mary Lynch VanderKolk. She and pianist Gorini followed with three songs by Florence Price (arranged by the oboist) with the duo vying with each other for poignancy honours. A phrase from the first Blake song could apply to the entire concert: 'Sweet joy befall thee'. In these times, we could all use a bit more sweet joy like this.

BRUCE HODGES



Glorious Brahms from the Marlboro musicians

MARLBORO PHOTO PETE CHECCHIA. WEITHAAS PHOTO MARCO BORGGREVE

Berlin

ANTJE WEITHAAS (VIOLIN)
ENRICO PACE (PIANO)

PIERRE BOULEZ SAAL 12 DECEMBER 2023

Any thoughts that Antje Weithaas's debut recital in Berlin's Pierre Boulez Saal might be jeopardised by a last-minute substitution – Enrico Pace replacing an ailing Dénes Várjon at the piano – were laid to rest within a few bars. Beethoven's A minor Violin Sonata op.23 made for a powerful opening, Pace making his mark with a forceful contribution to this piece 'for piano and violin'. With both halves repeated, the first movement was given uncommon expressive weight, its final reprise achieving an uplifting sense of homecoming. The second movement's two contrasting sections were all of a piece, its opening theme – an almost Schumannesque intermezzo – discreetly embellished. It led attacca into the final rondo which featured a shining C major central episode. Subsequently, Clara Schumann's *Three Romances* op.22 effectively showcased the juicily songful lower register of Weithaas's Stefan-Peter Greiner violin.

Antje Weithaas: an impressive Berlin debut

Clara's first *Romance* references the main motif of Robert's A minor Sonata op.105, which followed on the programme, its edgily nervous atmosphere well caught by the duo. Weithaas's heart-stopping phrasing in the slow movement contrasted most effectively with the finale's insistent spiccato. Three movements from Kurtág's *Signs, Games and Messages* were given a concentrated, Classically shaped reading by Weithaas, showcasing a huge dynamic and chromatic palette that reached from disembodied *molto sul tasto* to screeching ponticello sounds. In the concluding 'Kreutzer' Sonata, Weithaas and Pace took the piece's subtitle – 'like a concerto' – at face value, with no holds barred in a reading that successfully took every risk with outgoing virtuosity at hell-bent tempos in the outer movements and some theatrically characterised variations in the middle one. After the breathless final Presto, the lilting Scherzo from Beethoven's op.30 no.2 made for a delightful envoi.

CARLOS MARÍA SOLARE

London

TOBIAS FELDMANN (VIOLIN)
BORIS KUSNEZOW (PIANO)
WIGMORE HALL 10 DECEMBER 2023

Tobias Feldmann opened this Sunday morning concert with Mozart's G minor Sonata K301, playing as if in duple time, his phrasing elegant and colourful. In the second-movement Allegro he made constant dynamic changes, switching in an instant from punchy staccato phrases to something light and airy. He produced a muscular, meaty start to Poulenc's Sonata before a long-breathed account of the second theme, and moved on again to ferocity, playing with a big sound and rhythmic certainty, technically impressive through the composer's musical kaleidoscope. The central Intermezzo was floating and tender before emerging into more emotional territory, always intimate and urbane. Energy gave way to tragedy at the end of the third movement, Feldmann's tone heated, and he held his poise at the end as the piano chord lingered on.

At the beginning of Schubert's Fantasy in C D934 he demonstrated exemplary legato bow control above Boris Kusnezow's fine piano playing. In the Allegretto he was crisp, light and dancing, and there was simple, lyrical beauty in the Andantino followed by agile passagework in the variations. To the C major Allegro he brought grandeur and jubilation, before finishing with tremendous brio in the final Presto.

TIM HOMFRAY

Tobias Feldmann and Boris Kusnezow: elegant and colourful

Impressive focus from the Gildas Quartet

GILDAS QUARTET
KINGS PLACE 10 DECEMBER 2023

This Surround Sound Session by the Gildas Quartet – part of Kings Place's Sound Unwrapped series – may not have featured the hall's d&b Soundscape speaker array, but the principle is the same, with the audience placed in some way at the centre of the experience.

Britten's String Quartet no.3 was the focus of the hour-long performance, following the *Three Idylls* by Britten's teacher Frank Bridge and the Waltz from Britten's *Three Divertimenti*. The Gildas played the quartet from memory, the players rotating positions between movements around the four corners of the audience's square seating formation. The players also explored the dimensions outside, just inside and at the focal centre of the square. Dimmed lighting and pre-show audio of the bells from St Mark's Venice (referencing the bell-like passacaglia of the final movement, titled 'La Serenissima') added to the atmosphere.

Spoken introductions are always a welcome barrier-breaker but here, even with each of the players taking turns, this felt a little stilted and conventional: perhaps it needed a more dramatic treatment.

The spatialisation helped tease apart the strands of the quartet's first movement ('Duets') and intensified the isolation of the third ('Solo'), whose fragile, bleak beauty was amply conveyed by fearless first violinist Tom Aldren. And performing the work from memory entrenched its poignancy and intensity.

EDWARD BHESANIA

JANINE JANSEN (VIOLIN) TIMOTHY RIDOUT (VIOLA) DANIEL BLENDULF (CELLO) DENIS KOZHUKHIN (PIANO)
WIGMORE HALL 21 DECEMBER 2023

GILDAS PHOTO MATTHEW JOHNSON. FELDMANN PHOTO WIGMORE HALL TRUST 2023

Powerful Brahms led by Janine Jansen

Janine Jansen opened this all-Brahms programme with his Second Violin Sonata in A op.100, her tone lush and generous with a big vibrato, before becoming more severe in the development section, with sudden changes of dynamic and passages of hushed intimacy and relaxation which gave way to fierce outbursts of martial dotted rhythms. The central section of the second-movement Andante was punchy and eloquently phrased, and there was passion in the finale, with moments of high drama.

Timothy Ridout followed her with the E flat Viola Sonata op.120 no.2, genial and flowing at the outset with some fruity C-string playing to follow, and fine dialogues with pianist Denis Kozhukhin. The second movement was impetuous and full-bodied. Ridout brought a questioning quality to the final Andante con moto; its third variation floating, almost a meditation, before the muscular outburst of the fourth and the jubilant finish.

The three of them were joined by cellist Daniel Blendulf for Brahms's C minor Piano Quartet op.60, full of drama and theatrical tragedy with some serious power playing from the two upper strings. They were variously spectral and vehement in the first movement and ended the second with near-symphonic weight. There was finely balanced contrapuntal shaping in the Andante, and the Finale was full of contrasts, with alluring charm followed by mighty tonal power.

TIM HOMFRAY

PHOTOS WIGMORE HALL TRUST 2023

LEONORE PIANO TRIO

WIGMORE HALL 31 DECEMBER 2023

Playing Haydn, said pianist Tim Horton after the Leonore Piano Trio had opened this Sunday Morning Concert with the composer's Piano Trio in A major, Hob.XV/18, 'is the best thing in the world'. He was clearly speaking for all three players, whose performance was underpinned by elegance, playfulness, sparkle, a range of articulation and mock comic-opera drama. More than being simply lively, the playing was boldly alive, and not only in the quicker music: the musicians struck a perfectly paced Andante in the slow movement, which in some hands might have seemed audaciously slow, but that allowed the music to breathe spaciously.

The players imbued Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio with an aptly monumental scale, bringing alive its bold Romantic passion and distinctively Russian inflection. Far from sprawling, the first movement sounded unusually concentrated and cast a mesmerising hush over the audience at its close. The huge theme-and-variation second movement opened with a theme of simple, folk-like innocence. The scherzo-like Variation 3, super-pearlescent, was followed by a richly dark and unmistakably Slavic Variation 4 and, later, by an elegant quick waltz in Variation 6. Horton brought magically rippling arpeggios to Variation 9, as well as crisp capriciousness to the ensuing mazurka variation. It was a hugely committed, triumphant performance from all concerned.

EDWARD BHESANIA

A New Year's Eve treat from the Leonore

D'AMBROSIO Suite; String Quartet; En Badinant; Valse intermède; Pavane; Rêve
Archos Quartet, Friedrich Thiele (cello) Mio Tamayama (double bass)
TACTUS TC870401

Telling performances show a Neapolitan virtuoso in a new light

The violinist Alfredo d'Ambrosio (1871–1914) was celebrated in his time as a composer–virtuoso who could conjure up profitable salon charmers alongside a showpiece concerto for the Berlin Philharmonic. This album of his chamber music illuminates another, more rigorous side to him, though the modest designation of Suite for the four-movement string quintet of 1900 reveals that d'Ambrosio was not aspiring to Brahmsian heights of formal integrity. Couched in a style between Mendelssohn and Mediterranean Elgar, the Suite satisfies very well on its own terms. Melodies seem to come easily to d'Ambrosio, the best of them being the gentle and fleeting Berceuse, before a finale that feels slightly out of place in its vein of earnest striving (more Elgar).

From eight years later, the String Quartet admits more unstable harmony and even embraces Expressionism at times. Any adventurous quartet would enhance its repertoire with this piece, though it would be hard pressed to match the rhythmic vitality, transparency and warmth of the Archos Quartet.

The miniatures for quintet depend on a relaxed pulse and well-pointed accents to keep excess sentimentality at bay; and the players have the full measure of them in a naturally engineered studio setting. The album's only shortcoming is the abysmal 'translation' of the Italian booklet essay.

PETER QUANTRILL

BACH Violin Sonata in A minor BWV1003 (Andante only); Partita in D minor BWV1004 **GRIEG** Violin Sonata no. 2 (Lento doloroso – Allegro vivace only) **MENDELSSOHN** Violin Concerto in E minor; works by **Arensky, Chopin, Drigo, Dvořák, Halvorsen, Kreisler, Massenet, Mendelssohn, Paganini, Schubert, Svendsen, Tchaikovsky etc**
Kathleen Parlow (violin) Charles Adams Prince, Ernest MacMillan (pianos) CBC Symphony Orchestra/Geoffrey Waddington
BIDDULPH 85036-2 (2 CDS)

A treasurable reminder of a great Auer-trained violinist

As it happens, I have not listened to any of Kathleen Parlow's records recently, so I was all agog to hear them when this marvellous set arrived. I had only to play the famous fast, accurate account of Paganini's Moto perpetuo, one of her four 1909 HMV 78rpm sides, to know that I was in for a treat.

This review will be shorter if I name those of the 25 genre pieces (plus five remakes) that impress me less. Of the HMVs, Bach's Air strikes me as rather lugubrious. From 1912 Parlow recorded for Columbia and of these sides, Beethoven's Minuet in G is strangely slow, Rubinstein's Melody in F is almost military-sounding and Bach's Gavotte is a bit peremptory. I am not sure that Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* Intermezzo works on solo violin.

My favourite of the acoustic records is a transcription of Thomas Moore's *The Last Rose of Summer*, slowly and lovingly played in 1912 – the 1916 remake is very similar, almost as magical. Two Halvorsen pieces which share a 1909 HMV side are beautifully done.

In 1941, after years of wanderings, Parlow returned to her native Canada and broke a quarter of a century of silence – as far as posterity is concerned – with a radio recording of Mendelssohn's E minor Concerto. At 50 her famed Auer technique is still in great shape and this is a beautiful, satisfying performance in excellent sound.

The first movement of Grieg's Sonata no.2 from the same year, with Ernest MacMillan at the piano, is slightly compromised sonically but not enough to efface the superb music making of these two great artists.

Finally, from 1957 when Parlow was 66, we have solo Bach, a probing Andante from the A minor Sonata and the entire D minor Partita. It is a shame that the Chaconne has some of the worst sound, but nothing can dim the impact of Parlow's artistry.

TULLY POTTER

Fabulous artistry from Kathleen Parlow

To browse through more than a decade of *The Strad*'s recording reviews, visit **www.thestrad.com/reviews**

BACH Cello Suites BWV1007–12
Filipe Quaresma (cello)
ARTWAY NEXT 52023 (2 CDS)

A newcomer makes his mark in a much-recorded repertoire

Portuguese cellist Filipe Quaresma offers a highly personal, historically informed approach to these works, performing throughout on a much treasured, four-stringed instrument – the c.1720 'ex-Suggia' Montagnana, reconverted to a Baroque set-up. He employs appropriate period techniques and produces an unforced, lucid sound, playing with incisive articulation and a clean, accurate left-hand technique, save for some brief passages in no.6's challenging Prelude and Gavottes. He especially demonstrates his Baroque sensibility and care for detail in realising the relative importance of notes within phrases. Although he occasionally over-phrases – which can endanger forward momentum, as, for example, in no.1's Allemande – there's an overall rhetorical freedom that sounds refreshingly improvisatory and allows the music to breathe, particularly in the Preludes. His execution of the chords in no.6's Sarabande has striking expressive effect, and those in the ensuing Gavotte I provide a pleasing rhythmic momentum.

His tempos, generally thoughtfully determined, are largely faithful to most movements' dance roots. Gigues are suitably lively, especially the exuberant one in no.4, but the Courantes of Suites nos. 1, 4 and 6 seem scrambled in places. His accounts of the Sarabandes are profound and reflective without being weighty – sample his moving readings of those of nos.3 and 5 – and his Allemandes are graceful and poised. Extempore ornamentation is added tastefully, but sparingly.

The close recording, captured in an accommodating monastery acoustic, is pleasingly reverberant, but Quaresma's audible intakes of breath and the percussive clatter of his finger-stopping often intrude upon the listening experience. The sparse booklet information incorporates some awkward English translation.

ROBIN STOWELL

MARIAN LENHARD

A hugely characterful partnership from Frank Peter Zimmermann and Jakub Hrůša

BARTÓK Rhapsodies nos.1 and 2
MARTINŮ Suite concertante; Meditation
STRAVINSKY Violin Concerto
Frank Peter Zimmermann (violin)
Bamberg Symphony Orchestra/ Jakub Hrůša
BIS BIS-2657 (SACD)

Potent characterisation sets this album apart from the competition

The rarity here is the *Suite concertante* of Martinů, in its second, radically revised version of 1944, opening with the same Toccata–Aria sequence as Stravinsky's Violin Concerto and likewise written with Samuel Dushkin in mind, but coloured by an anxious lyricism entirely the composer's own. Zimmermann's performance valuably underlines points of both difference and correspondence between the two works, as well as the more intrinsically violinistic nature of Martinů's writing. The bonus is the more romantically styled Meditation from the suite's original version, hinting at the upheaval experienced by the composer in the intervening years.

Zimmermann's account of the Stravinsky is tauter than most (Ehnes included), though never rhythmically straitjacketed. Inflections of vibrato and bolder touches of portamento round off the corners as if with Mozart rather than Bach in mind. What lifts it above most of the competition is the pungently characterised accompaniment of the Bamberg SO, and a recording perspective that keeps Zimmermann front and centre but allows him to duet with orchestral winds in the manner of a mature Mozart concerto. The twanging cimbalom takes on a continuo-like importance in Bartók's

Rhapsodies, where Zimmermann 'speaks' Hungarian in the phrasing no less expertly than his Czech for Martinů. It's an outstanding album, successful in every regard.

PETER QUANTRILL

LE TEMPS RETROUVÉ
BONIS Violin Sonata **BOULANGER** Nocturne **FAURÉ** Violin Sonata no.2 **HAHN** Violin Sonata
Elena Urioste (violin) Tom Poster (piano)
CHANDOS CHAN20275

Another voyage of discovery from this dynamic musical couple

A year on from their first Chandos release, *From Brighton to Brooklyn*, musical couple Elena Urioste and Tom Poster have followed up with *Le Temps retrouvé*, swapping a transatlantic musical survey of the 20th century (albeit slipping in an Amy Beach piece from 1898) with a French slice spanning the 15-year period from 1911.

Fauré's Violin Sonata no.2, the gateway to his adventurous final sequence of chamber works, is the best-known item. This isn't the only piece here to show off Urioste's secure but sweet sound in the upper registers, nor the only one to convey (in the second movement) an atmospheric vision of heaven.

The sonata by Mel Bonis (1858–1937), whose fellow students at the Paris Conservatoire included Debussy and Pierné, is perhaps the most revelatory piece – richly Romantic, with occasional undertones of the composer's teacher Franck. Urioste makes the most of the first movement's arching chromatic lines, presenting an effortlessly suave sound; she and Poster also compelling capture its languid mood. The second movement is alert and capricious, the third – a Greek popular song – is spun

CHRIS GLOAG

Heartfelt playing from Elena Urioste

out from the heart. Hahn's sonata, the latest piece here, is equally well played, a highlight being the blushingly intimate second movement.

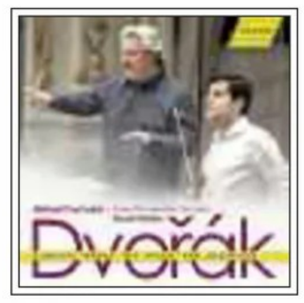
The engineering is first-rate. All else that's required is a dimly lit room, a sumptuously upholstered armchair and a kir royale.

EDWARD BHESANIA

BRAHMS String Quartets nos.1–3; Romanze op.118 no.5 (arr. Agate Quartet)
Agate Quartet
APPASSIONATO APP003 (2 CDS)

Conviction aplenty from this rising young French quartet

There is clean, crisp playing at the opening of Brahms's First Quartet in C minor, and the staccato semiquavers that follow are neat, almost delicate. The legato passages are sinuous and, as at the end of the exposition, rhythmically free, after which there is sterner stuff to come in the development. Following the warmth and gentle charm of the Romanze, the third-movement Allegretto is steady and mysterious: the players do exactly what Brahms marks, and do it very well, semplice,



piano, with little accents and hairpins and a constant throbbing pulse. The fierce opening octaves of the finale herald more turbulent emotions than we have had so far, leavened by poco tranquillo and meno mosso passages which are significantly slower.

The first movement of the A minor Quartet (no.2) is contemplative and steady, with a delightfully limpid second subject, its beguiling 3rds a mere step away from the coffee house. Later there is an arresting rhetorical gesture, dramatically slower and pre-empting the ritard poco a poco by five bars. The outbreak of F sharp minor in the second movement, disrupting its easy flow, is stark and steady. The Minuetto is bleak, cousin to Schubert's organ grinder, and the Allegro finale mixes nervy anxiety and grace.

The Agate's penchant for steady pacing is also apparent in the first movement of the B flat major Quartet, not quite as Vivace as Brahms presumably had in mind, but with earthy energy. Leader Adrien Jurkovic shapes the opening of the Andante beautifully, and violist Raphaël Pagnon produces robust playing in the following Agitato, before the stately Poco allegretto finale. The recording is clear and warm.

TIM HOMFRAY

DVOŘÁK Violin Concerto; Romance op.11; Mazurek op.49
Mikhail Pochekin (violin) Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra/Daniel Raiskin
HÄNSSLER CLASSIC HC23067

Empathetic readings of Dvořák's complete works for violin and orchestra

Dvořák's Violin Concerto opens with heroic flourishes from both orchestra and violinist: Mikhail Pochekin nails his top notes with aplomb. He is silky in Dvořák's melodies and fluid in the

passagework, and there are moments of high drama. Where the composer calls for grandioso, Pochekin is happy to oblige, helped by muscular orchestral tuttis and expressive wind playing. There is deep feeling and great tonal beauty in the second movement, and the più mosso outbursts have real power. As the movement progresses there is increasing Slavic majesty, and some silver-toned playing high on the E string. The Allegro giocoso finale is a good bouncing dance, with some spirited spiccato playing. Throughout, Pochekin handles Dvořák's technical demands with flair; he neatly dispatches the three-part counterpoint and hops up and down the G string with agility before the joyous final bars.

In the F minor Romance Pochekin produces singing lyricism and great tonal beauty, with vivid, ardent urgency at the centre. In the E minor *Mazurek* there is a swing to the melody in 3rds, and an attractive naivety to the Meno mosso section. The violin is to the fore in the recording, with orchestral solos well served.

TIM HOMFRAY

MÉLODIES INFINIES
ENESCU Piano Quartet no.1
FAURÉ Piano Quartet no.1
Suyeon Kang (violin) Karolina Errera (viola) Andrei Ioniță (cello) Cătălin Șerban (piano)
NAXOS 8.551477

Teacher and student meet in a persuasive pairing

As a student at the Paris Conservatoire in the 1890s, Enescu was recognised by his teacher Fauré as being 'very gifted, very hard-working' and also 'very entrenched in classical forms'. This pairing of the first piano quartets by both composers intriguingly reveals the French influence on the younger Romanian

– not least in the richly melodic, harmonically modal slow movement of his 1909 Piano Quartet. This is projected with a suspended air of mystery in contrast to its flanking movements; the aspiration to the sublime here is marred only by the occasional audible exhalation. Enescu's first movement certainly bears out Fauré's observation of structural entrenchment but in this performance it is fully able to shoulder a monumental sense of scale. The finale is brilliantly executed.

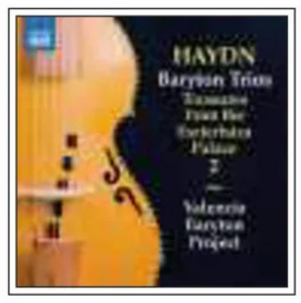
Fauré's Piano Quartet no.1 (1879, with the finale later revised) offers more flair. The first movement could take a touch more sweetness in places; and a little more transparency would lift the middle section of the dance-like Scherzo, especially when the piano takes over the tune to accompanying strings. But these minor quibbles are outweighed by an Adagio that deftly blends the tragic with the serene and a finale that unerringly shows off the players' individual talents.

EDWARD BHESANIA

GEMINIANI Six Sonatas for cello and basso continuo op.5
WEISS Three Preludes for lute
Kristin von der Goltz (cello) Andreas Küppers (harpsichord) Hille Perl (viola da gamba) Christoph Dangel (cello) Thomas Boysen (lute/theorbo)
CPO 555402-2

An unerring flair brings these demanding sonatas to life

Kristin von der Goltz shows striking mastery of the 'fantastical' technical challenges of Geminiani's Allegro movements and offers lyrical, intuitively musical accounts overall, fully acknowledging the fusion of Italianate and French styles in these works. He consistently demonstrates that their soul lies beyond the printed



page, shaping phrases thoughtfully and conveying the evolving dramas convincingly, as in no.5's opening Adagio and the sharply contrasting first two movements of no.4. His aim to differentiate between each sonata's inherent 'emotional state' is admirably fulfilled, whether by adding extravagant ornamentation to the sometimes tortuous and unpredictable melodic lines (as in no.2), in *ad libitum*/fantasia passages (in the middle movements of no.4), or even simply by keeping the melodic line 'plain'. Similar variety is applied in the continuo's instrumental combinations and timbres, no.1's third movement involving only gamba and no.3's first Allegro only cello 'accompaniment'.

Continuo cellist Christoph Dangel plays an especially important role in the dialogue, his contribution often crossing the solo line with strikingly sonorous effects, as in the middle section of no.6's finale. The Three Preludes by Sylvius Weiss, flexibly realised by lutenist Thomas Boysen, anticipate the tonalities of sonatas nos.2, 3 and 5 but their inclusion seems somewhat random. The recording is luminous and sensitively balanced.

ROBIN STOWELL

HAYDN Baryton Trios vol.2: nos.6, 35, 67, 71, 93 and 113
Valencia Baryton Project
NAXOS 8574504

Colourful playing brings a Haydn byway alive

Notwithstanding the intrinsic antiquity of music written for a long-obsolete instrument, the Valencia Baryton Project sounds more stylishly 18th-century than its rivals on record in this, its second sampling of Haydn's surviving output of 67 trios. It's partly a

matter of gentler pacing that (perhaps paradoxically) allows for more animated phrasing, and even a measure of harmonic tension – as far as is possible in such temperamentally placid music. Haydn evidently accommodated not only the insatiable enthusiasm of his patron for the baryton, but also his modest performing ability, and perhaps also the nature of an instrument that resists rapid and complex harmonic change, with its array of gently thrumming sympathetic strings.

Given their origins, the Valencian musicians are accordingly sensitive to Haydn's Boccherini-like touches of colour such as the strumming pizzicatos in the opening Adagio moderato of no.6. They effectively hint at a pathos akin to the *Seven Last Words* in the corresponding movement of no.113. Bringing an authentically rustic bounce to the quicker opening of no.71, they go on to phrase the counterpoint of the finale like an Italian motet. Close and repeated listening, as ever with Haydn, only serves to deepen admiration for his endless versatility at turning commonplace gestures into gold.

PETER QUANTRILL

SONGS OF FATE

JANČEVSKIS Lignum **KUPREVIČIUS** Chamber Symphony 'The Star of David': David's Lamentation, Postlude: The Luminous Lament; Kaddish-Prelude; Penultimate Kaddish **ŠERKŠNYTÉ** This too shall pass **WEINBERG** Nocturne; Aria op.9; Jewish Songs op.13: nos.2, 4 and 5; Kujawiak

Vida Miknevičiutė (soprano) Nagdalena Ceple (cello) Andrei Pushkarev (vibraphone) Kremerata Baltica/Gidon Kremer (violin)

ECM 4859850

A highly personal programme offers a typically searing experience

A haunting new album from Gidon Kremer and friends

Gidon Kremer has compiled an eloquent evocation and celebration of his Jewish heritage in an eclectic programme of music written since 1942. His choices offer stylistic variety and timbral diversity, but naturally much of the sentiment is melancholic and searching. Kremer ensures every violin note is vivid; his musical voice whispers and shouts, depicts fury and repose, weeping and sighing. He imbues a wide range of emotion with compelling character. Alongside his artistry, the soprano Vida Miknevičiutė is mesmerising, and Kremerata Baltica is beautifully honed, imbuing everything with great atmosphere.

The opening and closing tracks are hauntingly otherworldly – Šerkšnyté's *This too shall pass* being exquisitely ethereal, while Jančevskis's *Lignum* is contemplative, using microtones with a sort of blended tonality. Kuprevičius's *Kaddishes* are captivating, their musical invention burnished with sadness. A dialogue between violin and percussion in the *Kaddish-Prelude* is particularly intimate and searching. In the Postlude from the Chamber Symphony the soprano and violin lines intertwine with a controlled yet piquant anguish.

It is largely thanks to Kremer's staunch espousal that Weinberg has now come into his own as a composer. Here the early Nocturne and *Kujawiak* are utterly beguiling, conveying perhaps an understated expressiveness and a recessed sadness. Kremer has sourced some poignant and beautiful works to frame his personal journey and, in this warmly engineered recording, portrays them with insight and nuance.

JOANNE TALBOT

MENDELSSOHN Cello Sonatas: no.1, no.2; Assai tranquillo; Song without Words; Variations concertantes **COLL** Dialog ohne Worte **HOLLIGER** Lieder ohne Worte **RIHM** Lied ohne Worte; Verschwundene Worte **WIDMANN** Lied ohne Worte

Sol Gabetta (cello) Bertrand Chamayou (piano)

SONY CLASSICAL 19439934002 (2 CDS)

Plenty to entice here, as Mendelssohn meets modern masters

You can rely on Sol Gabetta to present central repertoire with seemingly effortless aplomb and bags of personality. And while time spent with Mendelssohn's two major masterpieces for cello and piano – the Second Sonata and the *Variations concertantes* – is never time wasted, it's good to hear the First Sonata played with the same level of passion and involvement.

Gabetta and Bertrand Chamayou have been playing the Second Sonata together for several years and their rapport is evident from these propulsive, responsive performances.

ANGIE KREMER/ECM RECORDS

She plays the 'Bonamy Dubrée-Suggia' Stradivari of 1717 – formerly in the possession not only of the cello goddess Guilhermina Suggia but also of Pablo Casals – strung with steel-wound gut-core strings. This has a less outgoing overall tone than the 1730 Gofriller (conventionally strung) she uses elsewhere in the set, richer at the extremes of the range than in the middle. Chamayou, meanwhile, chooses an 1859 Blüthner, with its telling tonal variance from almost blunt bass to drily clangorous upper treble. The pairing of the two instruments in the hands of these foremost players is an added attraction in the Mendelssohn.

Further attraction is provided by a short second disc presenting works commissioned by Gabetta to muse upon Mendelssohn's *Song without Words*. Jörg Widmann's *Lied ohne Worte* adopts aspects of Mendelssohn's language and refracts them through its composer's own aural lens; Heinz Holliger's three *Lieder ohne Worte* employ a panoply of extended techniques and expressive devices for a more alienating sound world. Francisco Coll's *Dialog ohne Worte* is sustained and lyrical; and while Wolfgang Rihm's *Lied ohne Worte* is more halting, his *Verschwundene Worte* ('Vanished Words') returns to a more diatonically based landscape. It's a fascinating pendant to the main event, so come for the Mendelssohn but stay for the new works.

DAVID THREASHER

STRAVINSKY Violin Concerto; Apollon musagète; Suites nos.1 and 2; Circus Polka
James Ehnes (violin)
BBC Philharmonic/Andrew Davis
CHANDOS CHSA5340

Overly urbane accounts of Stravinsky, though Ehnes impresses

Performing styles in Stravinsky's Violin Concerto have come a long way since the rhythmically unyielding mask of 1960s modernity donned by the likes of Stern and Schneiderhan, and James Ehnes has given careful thought to the Italian Baroque models for each movement. The flux between song and recitative of the first Aria evokes a Monteverdian *ballo* – Ariadne abandoned on Naxos, perhaps – before Ehnes unfurls a spacious legato to paint a contrasting portrait of solitude in the raptly inward mood of the second Aria. The warmth of Ehnes's G-string tone in the closing Capriccio nicely distinguishes it from the clockwork momentum of the opening Toccata.

If there persists a suspicion that Stravinsky is turning the lathe too smoothly in his practised groove of arch Neoclassicism, that may not be entirely the soloist's fault. Davis elicits neatly sprung but not especially characterful accompaniment from the BBC Philharmonic. His account of the ballet *Apollo* (in its 1947 revision) would likewise be good for dancing, but falls short of memorable individuality in a crowded field.

The transparency of the engineering by Chandos only serves to underline marginal imprecisions of ensemble; the miniature character sketches of the two suites come off more vividly, but there's a keener, more satirical edge to both recording and playing in Chailly's Decca recording with the London Sinfonietta.

PETER QUANTRILL

VIVALDI Concerti per una vita; works by **Legrenzi, Mouret** and **Westhoff**
Le Consort/Théotime Langlois de Swarte (violin)
HARMONIA MUNDI HMM90237374 (2 CDS)

Panache aplenty from a young master of the Baroque

This survey of Vivaldi's life focuses on his violin concertos, in whole or in part, but also embraces other works relevant to its biographical intentions. Théotime Langlois de Swarte executes his soloist's duties with technical brilliance, precision, tonal purity, imagination and period style. He revels in the virtuoso feats and special effects in RV278, 370, 583 and 267a and makes the Allegros as fleet as possible to arouse maximum excitement. He even whips up the pace further towards the end of RV813's finale and RV315's opening movement; and he negotiates RV315's finale and the Allegros of RV37a and RV250 in overdrive, often with a resultant loss of bass definition. He plays the slow movements with modest vibrato, finely etched phrasing, tasteful ornamentation and a flowing sense of line, particularly the poetic Largos of RV171 and RV250 and the lilting quasi-sicilianos of RV569 and RV256.

His 1665 Stainer violin sounds sweet and lucid, especially in the high registers tapped by RV349 and the opening movements of RV256, 171 and 252. Vivid theatricality abounds, notably in 'L'estate' RV315 and in excerpts from Vivaldi's operas RV709 and 714, and RV237's reference to the bariolages of Westhoff's *Imitazione delle Campane* is also highlighted.

Le Consort provides sterling support in combinations that vary from intimate – for the Sonata RV37a – to extrovert, for the Allegros of RV569, the first introduced with a horn fanfare by Mouret. The continuo group is liberally stocked, incorporating some rare instrumental timbres. The well-balanced recording has a pleasing mix of clarity and bloom.

ROBIN STOWELL

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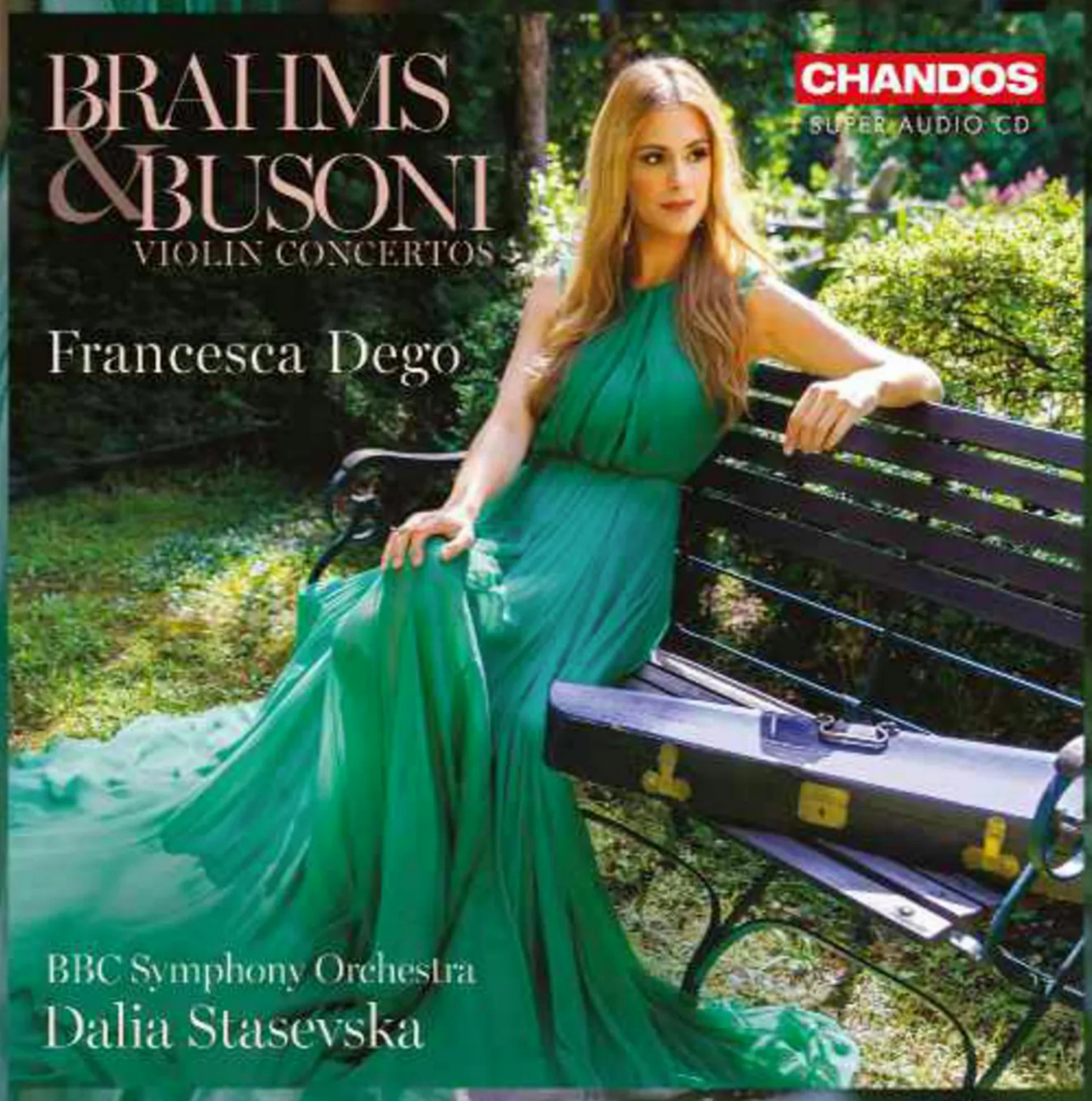

CHSA 5333

Celebrated violinist Francesca Dego is joined by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and their Principal Guest Conductor Dalia Stasevska for this recording of the violin concertos by Brahms and Busoni, marking the 100th anniversary of Busoni's death.

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Kristina Mirkovic

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DANTONE EDIZIONI

Violin in Action is a set of four volumes developed by Serbian violinist Kristina Mirkovic, designed to be used either as stand-alone method books or in connection with 'Metodo Mirkovic', an online violin school where lessons can be accessed by subscription or one-off payments. Each book offers a wealth of supporting material in the form of very detailed photographs, as well as links to online teaching and demonstration performance videos on YouTube.

Book 1, 'Complete violin course', undertakes a thorough exploration of basic bow division. Twenty-four different possibilities for dividing the bow are covered, including division in quarters, thirds and halves as well as in dotted rhythms, syncopation and compound/unusual time signatures, rather like a modern and user-friendly version of Ševčík op.2 for the 21st-century student. The next part of the book turns attention to the left hand, with a relatively brief presentation of the basic 0 1 2-3 pattern followed by many further exercises, each with a new combination of finger patterns, until all first-position options have been exhausted. Having worked through all the bowing and finger-pattern exercises, the student arrives at 'Song 1', the first of the 15 folk tune arrangements in the book. The previously learnt bow divisions and finger patterns are indicated in the text above the music, and reinforced in the accompanying YouTube video.

Book 2, 'Scale!', begins with a refresher course in the finger patterns previously presented in the first volume, explanations of the circle of 5ths, and a quick presentation of fourth-finger extensions. Again, the bulk of the first section of the book focuses on bow division then, after completing the 44 bowing variations, the student may move to playing tunes; there are 24 folk song arrangements, one for each major and minor key. Each tune is preceded by an outline of the first position notes in that key, with corresponding photographs and indications of the finger patterns. Eighteen further finger patterns are identified and labelled as part of this process.

In book 3, 'Positions!', attention turns to the business of shifting. First to be covered is third position, with shifts from first to third and back, and various finger pattern exercises (including extensions) followed finally by folk songs in third position on all strings. Second and fourth positions are covered in a similar way, and the remainder of the book focuses on shifting to and from different fingers within third, second and fourth positions.

Book 4, 'Intervals and Arpeggios', begins with a comprehensive chart (including photographs and finger pattern identification) of all first-position major and minor scales. Next comes a series of increasingly complex bowing exercises, before a gargantuan section on double-stopped intervals (each with its own photograph) and double-stopped scales in first position, all written out in full. Arpeggios, including inversions, are also covered before selected tunes from previous books are presented with the addition of double-stops. The book finishes with exercises covering all intervals from a 3rd to an octave on both the same and adjacent strings in first to fourth positions. This book has more of the feel of a manual for advanced students rather than a tutor book aimed at those in the early stages of playing.

Overall, this series contains a wealth of useful and interesting Serbian repertoire to explore, and one of the most interesting aspects

Kristina Mirkovic (fourth from right) with students of the Metodo Mirkovic course

LISA CARDINI

of the book is the chance to explore tunes with time signatures of 7/8, 11/8 and 9/8 (as 2+2+2+3). There are unfortunately no accompaniment-only or piano backing tracks available for any of the folk tunes, and it is worth noting that while the Book 1 videos are available in either English or Italian versions, the videos for the later books are bilingual, so non-Italian speakers will need to fast forward to the English sections – timings are, helpfully, clearly indicated in the notes.

The series is written by a violinist who is clearly passionate about precision and preparation. The books seem to be aimed at children but might be more suited to the earnest teenage or adult beginner, perhaps those coming to the violin as a second instrument, who would embrace the discipline of attending to hardcore technical work from the outset, without being patronised by cutesy cartoons and nursery repertoire. I fear that the majority of my students (aged four to teenage) would go on strike if I insisted that they work through weeks or months of exercises before being let loose on a tune. But I am sure that any students who are dedicated and determined enough to work through the exercises in these volumes from beginning to end, aided by the many online videos, will find that their knowledge and understanding of bow divisions and finger patterns, as well as Serbian folk music, will be second to none.

CELIA COBB

Polish Violin in the Musée de la Musique in Paris
Jan Bartoś
96PP ISBN 9788365727671
WYDAWNICTWO AKADEMII MUZYCZNEJ W POZNANIU €50

In 2016 Jan Bartoś co-authored the excellent publication *The Polish School of Violin Making from Groblicz to Dankwart*. He has followed this up with an examination of an instrument in the Musée de la Musique in Paris, the first in a projected series of monographs. What at first glance might look like a uninspiring read, concerning a hitherto anonymous violin in the museum's reserve collection, turns out to be a fascinating study of a violin clearly steeped in the Polish school.

This study utilised the traditional methods of violin experts and the resources of the Musée de la Musique and the institute of the Paderewski Academy of Music in Poznań. The examination process is clearly described in the introductory passages by Jean-Philippe Échard, curator of stringed instruments at the Musée de la Musique.

The Musée de la Musique's violin, made in Poland after 1670

The first of the four chapters gives a data-rich account of the historical background of Polish making in the 17th and 18th centuries. It concludes by outlining the physical characteristics of the Polish violin school, which really are like no other: the wood choice, unusual pegbox shapes and carved heads, the Maggini-inspired full-bodied instruments with long lower bouts and bird's-eye maple, and notably the f-holes with their strange wings disappearing to a point make the school really quite distinctive.

Chapter two describes how the process of analysing the instrument was undertaken, with all techniques clearly described. Using UV and endoscopy the researchers examined the alterations that had been made, which included some re-cutting of the f-holes. Bartoś then describes the lengths he went to in recreating what the f-holes might have looked like. The monograph contains an excellent poster which, along with the information in the book, is enough to inspire a maker to create a copy of the violin. The pictures are clear and well printed on matt paper.

Chapter three gives a detailed, almost forensic description of the violin, and how the author came to the conclusion that the violin was made in Poland after 1670. While this may not sound groundbreaking, we are taken through the painstaking journey of attribution. In his conclusions Bartoś passionately outlines the next steps using CT scanners, chemical analysis and more research in the Polish archives, which will continue to fill the gaps in the fast-moving and intriguing story of Polish violin making. This is a laudable addition to the luthier's and dealer's library.

PHILIP BROWN

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110 YEARS AGO

From the ARCHIVE

FROM THE STRAD MARCH 1914 VOL.24 NO.287

After a long break from the violin, how can amateur violinists ease themselves back into playing? Regular correspondent 'Lancastrian' (Dr William Hardman) gives his thoughts

All is ready, the bow tightened and rosined, and the violinist puts the violin up to his chin. How heavy it feels: how awkward the position: the bow, methinks, too, has increased ounces in weight! The artist essays to play some piece he knows well. How weak his fingers seem. They are not stopping in tune. Shocked, he tries various skips of intervals he used to do correctly without conscious effort. They come out painfully out of correspondence with what he has in his mind. He tries a little familiar double stopping. The result is woefully short of intention and expectation. Something simpler must be tried, and he goes through the scales with separate bowings. Alas! a new distress awaits our artist, for he discovers the movements of the bow, and the actions of the fingers have got out of precise correspondence. Cowed and disheartened he puts the instrument down and groans.

Thinks he, "Have I lost in these few months a good part of the results of years of conscientious endeavour? Shall I ever be the same again?" Yes! If you go the right way about it you will be as good as ever, and possibly better.

Select a composition—not an exercise, not even Rode, Kreutzer, or Fiorillo—but a composition possessing qualities the nature of which will be indicated by the example which, with all diffidence, I shall specify. The composition which is not exceeded by any other known to me in its perfect capacity for fulfilling the purpose intended is Bach's Concerto, No.I, in A minor. This composition contains a lot of solid work for both fingers and bow. The technique required is elementary, but, as far as it goes, singularly exhaustive, as is so much of the music of this, I would say, greatest of composers. It is a grand composition, soul satisfying. It does not arouse paroxysms of emotional orgasm, but it creates a mood, an atmosphere. It never becomes hackneyed or stale, play it as often as you like, and there is not a really difficult bar in it. Commence by playing it very slowly. If there is the slightest inaccuracy in intonation, play the phrase over again, and as often as may be necessary to obtain correctness. Count bars frequently when there is any tendency to unsteadiness. There are so-called "accidentals" in fair number, and also changes of key, but always into closely related keys. Though much of this composition may be played in the first position, yet much of it can best be done justice to by the adoption of the various other more suitable positions. This means an almost constant changing of position, which takes the technique brought into requisition not quite so simple as, at a first glance, it might seem. ●

PHILLIP KNOTT

THE STRAD

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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The violinist and conductor talks about his role as music director of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields

The improvised concerto
Danish violinist Christina Åstrand has commissioned an innovative concerto that will never sound the same twice

Richard Otto Glässel
The life and career of the Markneukirchen bow maker (1885–1931), known for creating bows in the Parisian style

Boris Pergamenschikow
A look back at the life of the influential cellist and pedagogue, marking the 20th anniversary of his death

Cello bridges
We report on a new design which, it is said, provides more focus, power and clarity of sound to the instrument

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Masterclass
Gary Hoffman on Beethoven's Cello Sonata no.5 in D major

In Focus
A 1759 violin by Joseph Marquès

Sentimental *Work*

GIDON KREMER

For the Latvian violinist, Raminta Šerkšnytė's 2021 composition *This too shall pass* is a multifaceted and liberating work in these challenging times

I think the Lithuanian composer Raminta Šerkšnytė is one of the best in the Baltic region right now. Kremerata Baltica has premiered several of her works in the past, and in 2021 I received the score for *This too shall pass*, an eight-minute work for violin, cello and vibraphone. It's undeniably a beautiful piece and a good introduction for people who don't know Raminta's work; and I chose it because I don't think contemporary music should be ignored, and my duty is to serve living composers as well as dead ones.

Raminta has said that the piece 'expresses the transience of everything that happens in the natural world and in human lives'. But to my mind, what makes music so special is that everyone in the concert hall will listen differently and take away something unique from the experience. Only you can decide on the story behind the bar-lines! Also, I like composers who use sound to say something that would be very hard to translate into words, and this is a piece I think you can see as a description of our time. Raminta often says her works are easy to understand, but with your heart rather than your brain.

Kremerata Baltica premiered *This too shall pass* in September 2021 at the Kronberg Academy Festival, and a month later we performed it in Kyiv, for the 80th anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy in Ukraine. Just a few months later came the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I think we can see in this piece a commentary on the dramatic situation in the world; there are so many multidimensional crises we have to worry about, including terror in the Middle East, as well as our powerlessness to solve them. But the overriding emotion I take from the piece is one of liberation. As the title suggests, it delivers a statement that is not comforting but gives a sense of hope. It's something we can all associate with, and which is very necessary for us all in these times.

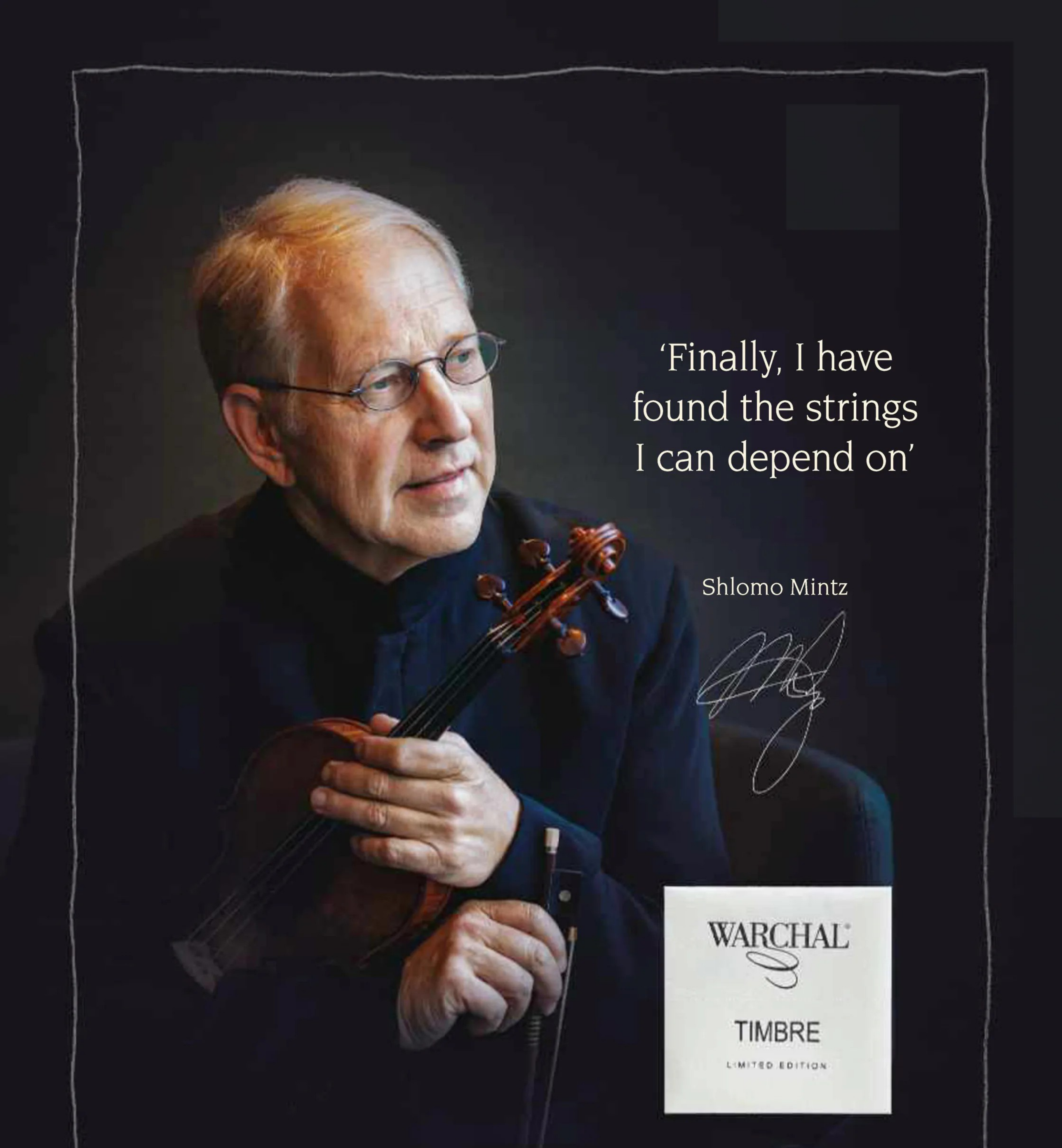
For this, Raminta uses a kind of tonal minimalism in the same way that Anton Webern and the composers of the Second Viennese School delivered clear, unadorned scores that minimised the number of sounds. Anything unnecessary is stripped away. Many musicians and composers strive for a sense of perfection in their work, but for me, listening to something imperfect gives a feeling of humanity. I think of the words of Nikolaus Harnoncourt, who I was lucky enough to work with many times: 'Perfection kills beauty.' There is something beautiful in *This too shall pass*, and every bar contains something different to explore.

I chose this piece to begin Kremerata Baltica's latest project *Songs of Fate*, a collection of short pieces relating to fate, injustice and tragedy, and the response of Baltic composers to elements in all of those things. In our troubled times there are certain values that should never be questioned and which need to be defended, as I hope comes across in the new recording. If I were introducing *This too shall pass* to a student, I'd advise them not to use it as a showpiece for them to try and show off, but to look inside themselves and discover an element of oneself that is the most valuable to them, and which they would want to associate with this music. ●

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD

Gidon Kremer and Kremerata Baltica at the world premiere of *This too shall pass* in 2021

PHOTOS ANGIE KREMER/ECM RECORDS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